UNDERSTANDING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS OF COLOR AND LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS STUDENTS

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Abstract
This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis sought to understand how elementary teachers perceived Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. The primary focus of this investigation was to explore teachers’ evolving assumptions of their students’ cultural capital, grounded in their interpretations of individual’s social assets, conceptions of self, and the influence of sociopolitical forces, which have the potential to shape teachers’ perceptions of their students. The secondary focus was to glean insight into how elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students informed their academic decision making. Participants were three White, middle class, female veteran teachers in one racially and socioeconomically diverse suburban district in Upstate New York. Transcripts were analyzed to identify themes viewed through Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory lens. Three superordinate themes emerged: the importance of personal relationships and experiences in shaping one’s beliefs, the influence of societal stereotypes and school district beliefs in shaping teachers’ perceptions, and conceptions of students’ cultural capital and academic decision making. The findings in this study support much of the existing literature on how an individual’s cultural capital leverages advantages and elevates status for students from the dominant culture and points to opportunities for ongoing dialogue and professional development regarding the dangers and lasting implications of teachers’ judgments and evaluations of students based on their social assets. The study found an infiltration of sociopolitical factors that influenced educators’ perceptions of their students and the need to bring about teachers’ consciousnesses of their beliefs regarding students with dissimilar backgrounds to explore biases and reduce misconceptions regarding students’ aptitudes, behaviors, and social assets which threaten to uphold inequalities within schools.

Keywords: perceptions, Students of Color, class, cultural capital, social assets
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study and Theoretical Framework

The American public education system requires students to attend school with the end goals of high school graduation and preparation for positive contributions to society (Brogdon, 1992). To fully realize these goals, public educators are tasked with preparing students with knowledge, competencies, and skills necessary to enter the workforce or to undertake higher education (Smith, 2014). White and Asian American students continue to outperform African American, Hispanic, and Native American groups, making them statistically more likely to meet graduation standards (Musu-Gillette, de Brey, McFarland, Hussar, Sonnenberg, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2017). Students from low income homes have been shown to hold higher dropout rates and are more prone to underachievement than their middle class peers (Murnane, 2007; Taylor, 2005). Often, Students of Color and poor students are labeled “at risk” or “low ability,” and educators react accordingly, interacting differently, and often lowering expectations for these student groups (Brogdon, 1992). If the purpose and goal of education is to equally serve, support, and graduate all students, then our systems must reconsider how underperforming subgroups, such as African American, Hispanic, Native American, and poor students are educated.

Statement of the Problem

The culture of public education achievement focuses strongly on pushing students to be successful using quantifiable and measurable results, typically based on standardized test scores (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). There are disproportionate achievement discrepancies between White, middle class students and students from other races and social classes (Weinstein, et al., 2004). The achievement stratification is reflective of the organizational structures found in societies in which certain populations are often segregated and viewed differently, often times according to race, ethnicity, and social class, and educational systems
have been frequently built based on the dominant culture (Brogdon, 1992; Yosso, 2005). For example, intelligence conceptions have been constructed with White, middle class, English-speaking students in mind, White interests and standards have been overvalued, while others’ interests and standards have been undervalued (Chu, 2011; Erickson, 2012; Weis & Fine, 2012). Given that nearly eighty percent of educators are White, middle class females, how and why these institutional conceptions have materialized is not surprising (Ford, 2010). Individuals who possess socially desirable attributes tend to have advantages over those with less desirable traits. Specifically, students who are seen as physically attractive, White, of higher social class, and highly interested or academically motivated are assumed to be more intellectually competent (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Endepohls-Ulpe & Ruf, 2005; Parks & Kennedy, 2005). These social hierarchies seen in society are reproduced within the school system (Yosso, 2005). Students from the nondominant culture are seen to lack the required cultural capital and skills that are deemed necessary for academic success and social mobility (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu (1977) asserts that individuals must accumulate cultural capital, either through inheritance or schooling experiences to gain access to power and social mobility (Yosso, 2005). However, if access to acquiring knowledge and skills is obstructed because they do not adhere to the dominant ideology, those individuals are more likely to struggle to succeed in school and in their future life outcomes (Chu, 2011; Lopez, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004).

**Teacher Beliefs about Students of Color and Poor Students**

The belief that Students of Color and individuals from poor homes are less capable than their White, middle class peers is prevalent in education, leading to discrepancies in outcomes among student groups (Brogdon, 1992; Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Teacher biases and assumptions play a significant role in perceptions and expectations of students (Alvidrez &
Weinstein, 1999; Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Perceptions and expectations have significant implications for students’ academic outcomes. Few studies to date have factored teachers’ perceptions of students into the root causes of academic achievement gaps (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Tyler, Boykin, & Waldon, 2006).

Understanding educators’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students’ abilities in the elementary school setting is a topic that must be explored. There are significant differences in student outcomes that vary according to social class category (Nan & Hasan, 2010; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014; Williams, 2011). Both working-class and Students of Color, particularly African Americans, are vulnerable to underachievement and low attainment in school (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Nan & Hasan, 2010). American institutions seek to close academic achievement gaps through school reform; this tactic, however, has had little impact on the gaps (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015). How students’ social class contributes to underachievement, and to what degree Students of Color and impoverished subgroups are affected must be clearly understood to reduce these differences in educational attainment.

Teachers’ perceptions, preconceptions, and societal influences may be significant contributing factors to both short and long-term achievement outcomes for student subgroups. Students from non-dominant cultures are often vilified: quickly faulted for perceived infractions, and assumed to be less intellectually competent by school faculty and staff, resulting in exclusionary discipline practices, fewer educational opportunities, and experiences that contribute to different levels of achievement (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Haight, Kayama, & Gibson, 2016; Kayama, Haight, Gibson, & Wilson, 2015; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015;
Townsend, 2000). These and similar teacher appraisals of students' abilities and potential increases the tendency of those judgments to become self-fulfilling prophecies (Parks & Kennedy, 2007), limiting their ability for future successes, inhibiting economic gains and social mobility, and curtailing the ability to positively contribute to society through civic participation.

Need for Equitable Educational Practices

A fundamental principle of democratic schooling practices is the creation of experiences for all students to succeed in learning (Möller, 2006). This means that fair and equitable experiences support various cultures, social statuses, economic standings, genders, races, and ethnicities (Fletcher, Parkhill, & Harris, 2011). Yet, according to Glock and Krolack-Schwerdt (2014), perceptions of students’ cognitive intelligence and recalling student information are affected by social categories. Neglecting inclusion of diverse cultures, social statuses, economic standing, genders, races, and ethnicities increases the likelihood of academic failure, underachievement, and dropout rates, heightens antisocial behavior, limits access to learning opportunities, elevates the likelihood of criminal activity, and escalates exclusionary discipline actions (Gregory et al., 2010; McCray, Beachum, & Yawn, 2015; Vincent & Tobin, 2011; Townsend, 2000). This lack of inclusion may also decrease students’ chances of future gainful employment (McCray et al., 2015). Judgment bias and stereotypically-based expectations can be effectively disrupted by adjusting the conditions for changing praxis toward student needs and supplication of appropriate tools for educators to support such endeavors.

Existing research indicates that teachers’ predictions of students’ academic achievement can be accurate; however, there is little research available on teachers’ perceptions of student intelligence in juxtaposition with their judgments as mediating influences (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Francis, 2012; Tyler et al., 2006). Previous research has focused primarily on
Students of Color and low-income student achievement and contributing factors to those outcomes. These studies, however, have failed to address prevailing educators’ beliefs as a potential contributing factor (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Tyler et al., 2006). Legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), No Child Left Behind Act (2002), and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) aimed to close achievement gaps between Students of Color and White students but have been found to contribute to its divide (Franklin, 2014; Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall, 2014; Golann, 2015, Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

**Teachers’ Beliefs as Connected to Their Teaching Practices**

A deficit ideology has been used to justify differences in achievement outcomes, attributing lower academic attainment to deficiencies within individuals, cultures, races, and communities. Viewing deprivation of cultural capital among Students of Color and the poor are a prevalent form of discrimination in American schools existing for over two hundred years (Yosso, 2005). The notion of a “culture of poverty” where the poor are portrayed as Persons of Color who are cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, and linguistically lacking, who must aspire to ascend toward a middle class culture in order to obtain future successes has been prevalent among educators (Dworin & Bomer, 2008). In addition to being vulnerable to higher rates of academic failure and school drop-out, Students of Color and poor students are at an increased risk for exclusionary discipline practices and have fewer opportunities to participate in advanced placement coursework (Chu, 2011; Green, 2014; Strickland-Dixon, 2011). Therefore, deficit beliefs held by many educators point to a connection between preconceived notions and biases to their academic decision making, thereby preventing equitable access to knowledge and skills. Such practices in American schools indicate the quantity and value of students’ perceived cultural capital and their potential academic competence.
Educators, students, and community members must increase their awareness of the contributing factors to academic performance of traditionally disadvantaged student groups to carve a path for universal student opportunity to thrive. A qualitative approach will aid in understanding interactions between school staff and students, policies and practices, and the effect of teachers’ perceptions on students’ abilities based on the academic decisions made by educators. This research study informs educators of the potential influence their perceptions have on their interactions with Students of Color and poor students. Investigation of teachers’ perceptions and the extent of their influence on educational decisions for student programs and equitable learning opportunities will be gleaned. This study sought to understand teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students.

**Significance of the Research Question**

This research’s significance lies in its potential to expand scholarly knowledge in the process of forming teacher perceptions, as well as the potential influence on educational outcomes by examining life experiences of participating teachers in this study. Understanding teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students may reveal classroom inequities and could lead to the development of policies and practices that afford equitable access for these student subgroups, elevating educational opportunities and potentially increasing achievement outcomes.

At the start of each academic year, educators make conscious and unconscious predictive assumptions on student achievement and behavior, thereby acting as predictors of future student academic achievement (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, & Pit-ten Cate, 2014). It was essential to explore the influence of teachers’ perceptions and expectations of pupils’ cognitive abilities, as there exists a noticeable, but as yet unexplained, discrepancy
between their presumptions of Caucasian students, Students of Color, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ aptitudes (Irizarry, 2015; Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012).

Expectations of intelligence and appropriate behavior are constructed with White, middle class, English-speaking students in mind (Chu, 2011; Erickson, 2012; Weis & Fine, 2012), causing students perceived to be non-acculturated to struggle to be academically successful (Chu, 2011; Lopez, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004). Educational opportunity access is restricted or blocked altogether for approximately half of American public school students because of their status as a Students of Color and their socioeconomic status (Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., & Tahan, K., 2011; Chu, 2011). Underserved populations are particularly vulnerable to rates of higher academic failure and school dropout (Nan & Zia, 2010). The U.S. Education Department notes that students living in poverty perform below the averages of both academic and graduation rates (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Each year, 3 percent of African American students and 2.9 percent of Hispanic students are retained, and over 15 percent of African American students receive out-of-school suspensions, in comparison to 1.5 percent of students from all other racial and ethnic groups (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Educational disparities are found in countless reports and scholarly research (Aud et al., 2011; Chu, 2011; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

The cultural disconnect between American educators (Irizarry, 2015) and students must be considered as potential influences of teachers’ perceptions of students. Investigating the underestimation of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ abilities may have a limiting effect on these student groups performing to their full potential. This study sought to increase awareness of educational equity and access, as well as the impact teachers’ perceptions of sociodemographic characteristics has in their interactions with and
expectations for students, the exclusionary discipline practices employed, and academic placements decided upon (Maye & Day, 2012).

In today’s increasingly diverse classrooms, few teachers are prepared for the disparities presented by cultural integration, and many lack the cultural competence and resources to bridge the divide (Debnam, Pas, Bottiani, Cash, & Bradshaw, 2015; Strickland-Dickson, 2011). This research can contribute by connecting and understanding how teachers’ perceptions can be viewed through the lens of social justice. It can also assist educators in discovering the influence of their identities and experiences on their conceptions of students’ abilities, and may suggest new practices, strategies, and interventions to support learning as a cultural practice to increase equity, and to empower underserved student populations (Debnam et al., 2015).

**Research Questions**

The inquiry-guiding question is: How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?

The subquestion is: How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making?

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

**Perceptions** are the ways in which an individual believes he or she understands someone or something. It is also found in individuals’ notice, interpretation, and impressions of someone or something.

**Students of Color** is considered a label or definition grouping Persons of Color into a separate racial and ethnic category apart from White students (Morris, 2019). The term *minority* is considered to be an offensive term (Morris, 2019). The term or classification of *minority* has been used to classify non-White groups of students, dividing them by race, segregating and
marginalizing these students (Morris, 2019). The term *minority* will only be used to communicate information as it appeared in the literature or from quotations from participants or authors. Although labeling groups does have the potential to create divides, for the purposes of this study, in order to address a small segment of the student population traditionally identified throughout the research literature as historically marginalized, Students of Color will be used to identify three specific groups of students, African American, Latinx, and Native American.

*Academic achievement* is the ability to demonstrate one’s knowledge, proficiency, and competence in schoolwork as defined by identified indicators used to measure one’s success.

*Diversity* refers to different types of people. Student and staff diversity relate to a variety of ethnicities, races, and social classes.

*Class* is a socially constructed term used to subjectively stratify individuals into a hierarchical structure based on wealth. Individuals are classified into upper, middle, or lower class groupings to delineate one’s socioeconomic standing.

*Cultural capital* is the acquisition and the possession of tangible and intangible assets. These include behaviors, education, skills and norms that promote social mobility and advantages. This is measured by the value society places on these assets during a given context or situation.

*Social categories* are defined as similar attributes, characteristics or traits a group of individuals share. For the purposes of this study, social categories represent common physical, cultural, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic class characteristics.

*Social assets* are attributes that an individual possesses which has value based on the institutions’ or dominant culture’s ideology.
**Self-fulfilling prophecies** are inaccurate beliefs regarding students’ abilities and capacities that materialize as a result of educators’ altered behaviors and actions toward students. This legitimizes previously constructed inaccurate assumptions.

**Social justice lens** means that individuals view education by considering it as a basic human right, which provides equal access, opportunities, and privileges to all students, and is constructed and implemented impartially and without prejudice.

The following section will include a description and discussion of Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural capital theory, which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

Educational research has examined academic performance stratification using various conceptual frameworks and theories to explain the perceived underperformance of Students of Color and low-income student populations (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Green, 2014; Minor, 2104; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). In considering the vast disparities in academic outcomes, evidence shows that White and Asian students outperform other student subgroups (Dumais, 2005; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Warikoo & Carter, 2009), including other races and ethnicities, English language learners, special education students, and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Researchers have not conclusively determined the reasons for disparities in growth among students with similar environments, social statuses, familial units, and parental educational backgrounds (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). This study sought to understand teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students through the lens of Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural capital theory, which will aid in the discernment of individual identity perceptions by authority figures. Cultural capital theory will be a lens to
understand how perceptions may leverage advantages and elevate status for some students, while obstructing progress and limiting status for other student groups.

Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of cultural capital stemmed from his cultural reproduction theory, which explained how dominant classes replicate and validate cultural aspects that maintain societal inequalities (Jæger, 2011). Cultural capital is the transference and reintroduction of knowledge and skills accompanied by its cumulative effects (Bourdieu, 1997). According to this theory, educators recognize and reward it in the educational setting (Bourdieu, 1997). The dominant culture holds institutional power and authority, forming a distinct social order, which includes or excludes individuals based on their perceived capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/2000). Conflicts may arise when educator and institutional cultures and pre-existing beliefs differ from those held by their students. Social background contradictions correspond to levels of individual cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/2000) posit that systemic biases favor those with inherited cultural capital, preserving and sustaining inequalities, leveraging advantages and privileges for those in possession of cultural capital.

There are three states of cultural capital within its namesake theory: embodied, objectified, and institutional (Bourdieu, 1997; Dumais, 2005; Jæger, 2011). Embodied cultural capital is an appreciation and understanding of objectified cultural capital (Dumais, 2005); this can be inherited and unconsciously transmitted and adopted over time, predisposing the individual to become responsive to comparable cultural influences. Communication skills, norms, mores, and self-presentation, based on one’s lived experiences and habitus, are part of the embodied state in which individuals can gain or maintain power (Dumais, 2005). This embodied cultural capital is displayed as we interact and move through the world.
Objectified cultural capital includes personal property and wealth of cultural value and profit to the individual. Bourdieu (1997) explained that those with objectified capital also possess embodied capital, exhibiting a keen awareness of property, wealth, and their social and fiscal value. The material objects and goods demonstrate the amount of cultural capital possessed, as well as one’s economic standing or class position. Legitimized cultural capital is invested to provide power and influence equivalent to the embodied capital (Bourdieu, 1997).

Institutionalized cultural capital is formal recognition of embodied cultural capital in the educational system (Dumais, 2005). In the institutionalized state, cultural capital is measured, certified, and ranked. Individual academic and professional qualifications and credentials can be converted to job market economic gains, validating one’s worth via reflection in professional position, education, and attainment, cementing cultural value and status (Bourdieu, 1997).

**Cultural Capital Theory Counterargument**

Cultural capital theory is used to explain differential treatment of various student subgroups and social stratification of academic performance. There are, however, alternative theories and critiques of cultural capital as a means to explain disparities (Carlone & Johnson, 2012; Delmont, 2010; Kingston, 2001; O’Connor, 2001; Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

**Cultural-Ecology Theory**

Cultural-ecology theory confutes cultural capital theory; ascertaining that there are two American minority groups: voluntary and involuntary (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). According to Ogbu (1978), a voluntary minority is an individual or descendant who voluntary immigrated to the United States, while an involuntary minority is one who is or was a descendant of someone “incorporated into the country via slavery, conquest, or colonization” (Warikoo & Carter, 2009, p. 369). In cultural-ecology theory, the two groups hold opposing academic success and upward
mobility conceptions. Voluntary minorities view academic success as a pathway to upward mobility, while involuntary minorities believe the pathway benefits White, middle class students only (O’Connor, 2001). Cultural-ecology theory seeks an explanation for the cultural role in Students of Colors’ underachievement.

**Cultural Deprivation Theory**

Cultural deprivation theory rivals cultural capital theory through its view of Students of Color and working class individuals as under resourced, and with limited academic potential, social, and financial gains (Delmont, 2010). Cultural deprivation theory identifies Students of Color’s cultural practices, classifying social groups by race and class of descending importance (Delmont, 2010; O’Connor, 2001). The theory depicts Students of Color’s races and classes as culturally deprived, thus self-perpetuating their underachievement (Delmont, 2010). Cultural deprivation theory posits that White, middle class children hold advantages over other races and classes because they possess and are able to acquire cultural capital, supporting their academic success (O’Connor, 2001). This theory, while supported by some sociologists (O’Connor, 2001), blames Students of Color and their families for underachievement, inferior norms, values, and skills. The educational cultural profiling explains the failure of Students of Color and poor students.

**Cultural Difference Theory**

Cultural difference theory challenges cultural capital theory by culture framing, or the belief that dominant culture practices are the “proper way of life” (O’Connor, 2001). Different from cultural-ecology theory, cultural difference theory does not view Students of Color and their families as deficient, rather, it investigates the cultural mismatch between schools, social classes, and racial and ethnic groups (Carlone & Johnson, 2012). Cultural difference theory
incorporates the incongruence between students and teachers that leads to miscommunication, a lack of understanding, and a misuse of student knowledge funds (Carlone & Johnson, 2012). The misunderstanding between teachers and students partially explains the underperformance of Students of Color (Carlone & Johnson, 2012; O’Connor, 2012).

**Criticisms of Cultural Capital Theory**

Kingston (2001), a critic of cultural capital theory, believes Bourdieu’s theory is flawed: vague, unclear, and contradictory. Kingston (2001) raises the point that teachers must use exclusionary practices and management techniques in response to students’ classroom behaviors and abilities, not their cultural or social background. Educators make academic programming decisions based on their assessment of students’ aptitudes, not social biases (Kingston, 2011). Kingston (2011) also shared that the upper classes have greater academic potential and appropriate behavioral skills as a result of a privileged upbringing and home practices, situating the lower classes in a disadvantaged position (Kingston, 2001).

Kingston (2001) also believes that variable bias exists because not all of Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural capital variables are observable, and that some variables are actually mislabeled as cultural capital. Jæger (2009) stated that more affluent families often possess characteristics and resources that contribute to student academic successes. These advantages are believed to stem, not from cultural capital, but other attributes, qualities, and skills that have a positive impact on student learning.

**Cultural Capital Theory Rationale**

According to Anfara and Mertz (2015), theory plays a substantial role in developing understanding of the phenomenon using fundamental epistemologies to qualitative study. This research study will apply a cultural capital theory lens to examine teachers’ perspectives
regarding Students of Color and poor subgroups of students by factoring participants’ lived experiences, outside forces, and educators’ assumptions into how academic decisions are made. This inquiry seeks to understand the influences of race, culture, power, hegemony, and inequity in underserved and marginalized populations. Examination of social, structural, and institutional trends positions educators to gain valuable insight into how possession of power may constrain or suppress Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students’ cognitive growth.

Humans are complex beings. Our social standing is dependent upon complex interrelated factors, such as gender, race, ethnicity (Beckett & Wrigley, 2014; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Glock et al., 2014; Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Peterson et al., 2016), social status, wealth (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Peterson et al., 2016), sexual orientation, and educational attainment (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005), all of which influence structural, cultural, and social identities, which are intertwined with material and power inequities. Inequities can surface with individual or group identity evaluation, coupled with actions that may privilege or obstruct resource access (O’Connor, 2001).

While other theories and arguments hold valid positions, they also tend to release educators and institutions from unequal practice and policy accountability. Kingston (2011) asserts variables are difficult to observe, however, using a cultural capital approach is a feasible investigation into this problem of practice. Students’ social assets are more easily observable and identifiable by educators, and students’ cultural capital is less likely to be concealed. Stereotypical thinking and judgment springs from student characteristics, is informed and shaped by individual positionality, and has major implications for student outcomes (Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborn, & Sibley, 2016). Kingston (2011) argues that socially privileged students have greater academic skills, and therefore also have improved chances for
success. Kingston (2011) equates this to home practices, verbal stimulation, parental involvement, access to educational resources within the home, and parental warmth, but does not examine the fact that students from similar backgrounds also underperform in comparison to their White peers. Kingston (2011) views struggling students as either culturally deprived or lacking the innate ability for academic success. Investigation of the phenomenon through the cultural capital lens may account for the thought processes of Kingston and other educators, drawing possible conclusions for academic disparities from valued cultural capital through the White institutional hegemony (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014).

Application of cultural capital theory may allow scholars and practitioners to commence understanding of individuals in the educational system, recognizing and rewarding students with perceived cultural capital. Jæger (2009) explained the educational system as a structural mechanism that misinterprets students’ cultural capital, unintentionally developing bias towards children. Investigating how perceptions were formed, how assumptions can be acknowledged and made transparent with the intent to neutralize bias can be studied using a cultural capital lens. In the future, this information could afford educators the opportunity to confront their biases and begin recognizing the gifts that accompany children from various cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

Much of the literature that focuses on teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students is quantitative in nature (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Glock et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2005; Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Pringle et al., 2010). Considering the topic solely from a quantitative vantage point limits the body of knowledge and insight into the issue. Quantitative methodologies assume a fixed, measured reality (Creswell, 2014). Reality, however, is dynamic and negotiated (Creswell, 2014). Much of the current research data explains
achievement disparities through analysis of numerical comparisons and statistical inferences but does not seek to ascertain deeper meaning from the perspectives of individuals’ lived experiences (Ferguson, 2003; Fischbach, 2012; Glock, 2016; Glock et al., 2014; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). By conducting a qualitative study using cultural capital theory, the phenomena was investigated through human experience, in greater depth and detail (Creswell, 2014). This qualitative study aimed to dig deeper into the phenomenon to uncover the thoughts, opinions, and motivations of elementary teachers in order to provide insight and context into this problem of practice (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009). Cultural capital theory application aided in the understanding of cultural capital itself, and how it was perceived by educators.

**Application of Theory to this Study**

Cultural capital theory application to the research question provided insight on the influence of cultural capital’s relative value to educators and institutions. Information gleaned at the teacher and district levels informed the cooperating district and participating educators on shifting practices and policies to position education as an equitable and cultural practice.

This study aimed to actively co-construct knowledge and understanding between the researcher and participants to better understand teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural capital theory guided this exploration of educators’ mindsets. Insight was gained into the formation and recognition of teachers’ perceptions of student subgroups, and whether educators neutralize or unconsciously allow biases to encroach on their academic decisions.

Through semi-structured interviews, teachers’ responses pointed to other influences, such as societal stereotypes, institutional policies and practices, and possible power structures that infiltrated public schools and influenced educational decisions that impacted Students of Color.
and poor students. Deeper, multifaceted comprehension of this issue aided in facilitating the cooperating district’s understanding of the influence of educator perceptions on teacher-student interactions, as well as on the quality and quantity of learning time spent with student subgroups. Furthermore, this research supported district consideration of professional development on awareness of individual positionalities and their impact on academic decisions. This work also contributed to the education field through acquisition of in-depth qualitative knowledge of the phenomenon.

Exploring the literature developed both broad and in-depth knowledge of existing field research, various topic interconnectedness, and the need for more qualitative work on this problem of practice. Examination of achievement disparities in search of understanding underlying causes holds promise in making critical educational practice adjustments, as well as provisions of training for emerging and veteran teachers alike. It continues to be imperative to seek processes that enhance and equalize students’ academic success by viewing the issue through the lens of social justice. Because teachers do not completely separate student characteristics when making educational decisions (Kaiser, Retelsdorf, Sudkamp, & Möller, 2013), participants’ deep reflection resulted in a more conscious awareness of the impact of their perceptions on students’ abilities, which limits, if not locks, the academic potential of Students of Color and poor students.

Conclusion

This research aimed to develop in-depth, multifaceted understanding of elementary teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. Comprehension of educator perceptions and institutional influences on the academic outcomes of Students of Color were achieved through investigation of existing topical literature and research.
Awareness of factors that contributed to and exacerbated educational disparities may lead to evolved practices that boost achievement for historically marginalized and underserved student groups. Understanding the formation and process of teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and poor students was key to developing the critical, fully-formed picture of the issue’s root causes and potential educational framework solutions.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the evaluation of factors contributing to academic achievement disparities, both scholars and practitioners must consider teacher perceptions related to the capability of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. This study does not seek to prove a correlation between the underachievement of poor students and Students of Color and teachers’ perceptions of their abilities. Rather, it seeks to understand the process through which teachers develop perceptions of student intelligence, and the impact those perceptions have on academic decisions.

According to Nan and Zia (2011), public school system demographics are rapidly shifting. In 1972, ethnic minority groups comprised a scant twenty-two percent of the school population (Nan & Zia, 2011), but by 2003, the number had increased to forty-two percent. Current projections indicate that by 2050, fifty percent of the U.S. public school population will be comprised of African American, Hispanic, and Asian students (Nan & Zia, 2011).

Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are statistically more likely to demonstrate gaps in achievement and have higher school dropout and lower graduation rates (Chu, 2011; Green, 2014). They encounter more exclusionary discipline consequences in school, and experience higher rates of school failure than their Caucasian peers (Chu, 2011; Pringle et al., 2010). Unless swift and drastic changes are made in education system practice, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that in less than forty years, roughly half of U.S. citizens will face higher rates of unemployment and poverty, as well as decreased quality of life.

A pertinent examination of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles was conducted via Education Research Complete and JSTOR to ensure thorough, effective research aligned with this guiding query: How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of their students shape their perceptions of students? The question explored how teacher perceptions were developed, then
applied to differential student positioning based upon cultural, social, and political standing. To support this research, the following subquestion was investigated: How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making? This question sought to delve into how the social assets of students, which influence the perception of a students’ cultural capital, shape or bias the decisions made regarding the education of Students of Color and poor students.

The literature review content was organized into three themes: first, a review of literature related to teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students, exploring the cultural mismatch between the two groups, and the subjective judgments associated with perceived cognitive abilities. Second, literature related to teachers’ expectations of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students within the contexts of race, ethnicity, and social class was examined. Third, literature that compared students’ self-fulfilling prophecy with their educational trajectories was reviewed. A literature review will lay the foundation for understanding teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Students of Color and Low Socioeconomic Status Students**

People make continuous judgments, consciously and subconsciously based on perceptions of others, of their context, and of their environment (Meissel, Meyer, Yao, & Rubie-Davies, 2017; Ready & Wright, 2011). Influences such as social class positioning (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008), racial, ethnic, or cultural differences (Delpit, 1992), or beliefs regarding the potential aptitude of a student (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) inform decision-making, but perceptions can be biased and potentially life changing (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999). Educators’ beliefs stem from perceptions of social, societal, and educational contexts (Ready &
Wright, 2011), and they can have a significant impact on student achievement (Ready & Wright, 2011; Williams, 2011).

The achievement gaps of Students of Color and underserved students have been recorded and recognized for over two hundred years, and it has been the subject of studies for decades (Williams, 2011). The gap has led to disproportionate access to wealth, power, and social and economic mobility for Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals (Rist, 1970/2000), but researchers have not conclusively identified the contributing factors leading to the disparities (Ready & Wright, 2011).

A core purpose of education has been the provision of opportunity to learn, to grow, to become members of and contributors to society, paving a path for social and economic prosperity, advancement, and security (Brogdon, 1992). Public schools mirror society (Rist, 1970/2000); institutional and societal expectations, policies, and programs must shift to promote development of historically marginalized populations, lest disparity and social inequity not only endure, but expand (Termes Lopez, 2017).

**Organizational Culture**

Institutional culture has the potential to influence teachers’ perceptions, and therefore, the quality of students’ education (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). The educational system and its curriculum bolster and maintain the preeminent status of the White middle class (Love, 2015), the group that has historically represented the American dominance of the global economy (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Shifts in the ethnic composition of student demographics, with their increased populations of Students of Color and economically disadvantaged students, have made achievement gaps more apparent – and concerning (Jester & Fickel, 2013). These groups continue to perform significantly lower on standardized assessments than their White and
more affluent peers (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2017). Analysis of performance differences and potential of non-dominant student groups, and bias must be completed.

Some school and classroom practices are “counterproductive to academic achievement of certain minority groups” (Pringle et al., 2010, p. 34). This can be seen in the ways in which resources are allocated for certain programs, providing advantages and prestige for certain subgroups of students, those from the dominant culture (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). This is evident in the reproduction of existing hierarchies, reinforcing the dominant language and codes and practices. Resources are earmarked for various courses such as gifted and talented classes and advanced placement coursework, all of which hold far lower enrollment numbers for Students of Color and students from low income households (Pringle et al., 2010). The language and communication styles and preferences in institutions are based on middle class ways of being, providing advantages for success for those students within the mainstream culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). The very criteria used by school districts and teachers to define academic giftedness illustrates differential treatment and outcomes (Speirs, Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007). Such factors influencing selection for advanced coursework includes an overreliance on standardized test scores and teacher referral practices favoring White and Asian students (Speirs et al., 2007). These factors point to distinct biases and negative perceptions of Students of Color, obstructing educational opportunities for Students of Color and elevating access for White, Asian, and middle class student groups (Speirs et al., 2007). These school and classroom practices affect graduation and dropout rates by subgroup (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2017), variations in higher level coursework enrollment, and disproportionate placement of Students of Color and lower socioeconomic status students in special education programs (Pringle et al., 2010).
The root of these differences lies within organizational culture, creating or reproducing a caste system (Rist, 1970) in which students are evaluated on the perceptions, stereotypes, and biases toward the “understood” characteristics and qualities of successful students (Glock, 2017). The organization’s definitions and understandings guide teachers’ perceptions within the system (Pringle et al., 2010), adopting frameworks geared toward White students that maintain the marginalization and oppression of Students of Color, thus promoting and widening the educational inequity gap.

Equal education access is stymied by systems catering to a single population, developing just a small segment of student talent in our achievement-driven culture (Weinstein et al., 2004), and eliminating the cultural content integration necessary for equal academic opportunity (Lopez, 2017). Additionally, the maintenance of ability-based programming, in which educational institutions sort students into differential pathways, creates varying educational conditions that impact students’ abilities to develop intellectually (Weinstein et al., 2004). In this way, where schools present unequal opportunities maintaining and mirroring the social class hierarchies seen in society (Rist, 1970/2000), many students are limited by the institution that was intended to help them grow.

An organizational and cultural shift toward a more inclusive, equitable, coherent system has the potential to heal the achievement breach through its influence on teacher perception. To identify factors which support the academic talent and achievement of Students of Color and students from low-income backgrounds, Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) conducted a qualitative case study of three separate high schools in the United States, each serving varied student populations over a four-year timeframe. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) found that effective schools have a common vision and mission for student success, with emphasis on those
traditionally underserved. The use of high student expectations and universal achievement language used by administrators, teachers, and students consistently and across the school community supported student success (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). This requires educators to reflect on their practices and policies in order to promote diversity over homogeneity (Rist, 1970). Such commitment to achievement through high quality, culturally relevant curriculum and responsive pedagogy, alongside a shared belief in students’ innate abilities and capacity for achievement, has demonstrated positive shifts and growth in the student outcomes and organizational cultures of Students of Color.

**Teacher Relationships with Student Groups**

Research has proved that student growth occurs through positive associations with school, and through teachers who build authentic, respectful, trusting relationships with them (Booker, 2004; Nan & Zia, 2011; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Students often feel, however, that teachers treat Students of Color and lower socioeconomic status students unfairly (Delmont, 2010; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). Murphy, Acosta, and Kennedy-Lewis (2013) discuss a quantitative study conducted by Skiba and his colleagues (2002), in which the subjectivity of teachers’ judgments was questioned. This study reviewed 11,000 middle school students’ discipline records in one urban district over the course of one school year and found that racial bias existed in teachers’ discipline referral practices since the severity of African American student behaviors was not disproportionate to the behaviors of White students (Murphy et al., 2013). Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers interact with Students of Color more negatively than they do with White students (as cited in Glock, 2017). This is evident in the differential treatment experienced by Students of Color (Glock, 2017). Students of Color have been found to be punished more harshly, using exclusionary discipline practices, as well as being
reprimanded more frequently for disruption or other misbehaviors in the classroom (Glock, 2017). Such interactions between teachers and Students of Color present barriers to the trusting and supportive educator relationships that students need to be successful in school.

Teachers are decisive actors in school social integration. Their perceptions of students’ teachability, as well as the behaviors teachers demonstrate toward students are strong predictors of student-teacher relationship success, and therefore, of Students of Color and poor students’ academic performance (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

Negative teacher perceptions of students have been proven to decrease student motivation and achievement (Williams, 2011). Positioning teachers’ perceptions toward an asset-based, (Lopez, 2017), “can do” mentality in which teachers exert genuine effort to understand their students’ perspectives, cultures, families, and experiences solidifies genuine relationships that promote a culture of caring that yields strong school attachment bonds (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014).

**Bias and Teacher Judgment**

People enter the education field to positively impact students’ lives, and to foster a passion for lifelong learning. Even though many educators hail from different backgrounds, experiences, and positionalities, their interpretations and perceptions often differ from the students they teach (Martinez, Stecher, & Borko, 2009). The cultural differences between the mainly White teaching force and Students of Color and poor student groups presents a disconnect, leading to higher instances of school failure and underachievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For some educators, whiteness can be viewed as social capital, affording power and privilege (Morris, 2005) to White students. This indicates the possibility of preferential treatment and overestimation of White students’ abilities (Fischbach, Baudson, Preckel, Martin,
Brunner, 2013; Sorhagen, 2013). Overestimation of student abilities, regardless of their race or circumstances, has not been found to be harmful to students (Fischbach et al., 2013; Sorhagen, 2013), while underestimation has been found to be damaging, particularly to already disadvantaged or marginalized students (Fischbach et al., 2013; Sorhagen, 2013). Disadvantaged and marginalized student groups have been found to have lasting longitudinal effects such as impairment of students’ intellectual development due to limited learning opportunities (Fischbach et al., 2013), lower test scores (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Fischbach et al., 2013; Sorhagen, 2013), and underachievement as compared to their demonstrated academic achievement (Sorhagen, 2013).

If the widely accepted stereotype that Students of Color perform below their Asian and White counterparts on standardized assessments is accurate, one could also reasonably conclude that Students of Color also perform poorly on classroom assessments. Irizarry (2015) found, however, that teachers rate high-performing African American and Latinx students lower than comparably performing White students. Such subjective judgments regarding students’ academic aptitude, motivation, and their behaviors have the tendency to widen racial gaps at the top and bottom of performance distributions (Endepohls-Ulpe & Ruf, 2005; Ferguson, 2003; Irizarry, 2015; Montoya et al., 2016). Consider that while a disproportionately high percentage of Students of Color and disadvantaged students are recommended for remedial and special education services, they are grossly underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and enrichment courses (Irizarry, 2015).

Several studies explore the relationship between stereotypical expectations and how teachers’ perceptions are formed through dual processing theories of impression and judgment formation (Glock, 2016; Glock & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2014). It is believed that processed
information is influenced by social categories (Green, 2014; Minor, 2014), meaning that educators make judgments about students based on characteristics including, but not limited to: race, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion (Green, 2014; Minor, 2014; Riley & Underleider, 2012; Rist, 1970/2000). Judgment in turn influences grading, retention, ability groupings, school tracks, gifted, and remedial program decisions (Green, 2014). Negative perceptions indicate bias, changing academic expectations for certain subgroups of students, and negatively altering daily interactions between teachers and students (Ferguson, 2003).

Impact on Discipline Practices

Negative teacher perceptions of student groups impact discipline policies and practices that can contribute to academic failure (McCray, Beachum, & Yawn, 2015). In a study conducted by Ferguson (2001), teachers reported disruptive behavior from White students as “normal,” but similar or equivalent behaviors exhibited by Students of Color was seen as “pathological” (as cited in Glock, 2017). This notion is supported by Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, and Marshall (2014), who posited that students from nondominant cultures’ differences are viewed as deficits that contribute to abnormal and disruptive behaviors. In Gibson and colleague’s qualitative study (2014), thirty-one African American teenage students who received suspensions in the 2012-2013 school year were interviewed along with twenty-eight caregivers, and nineteen educators. Students’ narratives along with their caregivers described the disproportionate suspensions, from their perspectives, as a social and racial justice issue since it appears that biases may have negatively influenced their suspensions. The educator respondents described challenges which interfered or influenced their interactions with African American students (Gibson et al., 2014). Such challenges included the diverse population of students, making it challenging to maintain a positive learning environment amidst the various cultural
beliefs and behavioral norms, as well as overcrowded classrooms, familial poverty, and underfunded schools (Gibson et al., 2014).

A large number of teachers descend from predominantly White middle class backgrounds (Love, 2015; Pringle et al., 2010). It is theorized that less exposure and interaction with others from different racial groups may magnify the possibility that one will be influenced by cultural stereotypes and assumptions (Morris, 2005). Therefore, one might conclude that conceptions of what is “normal” may stem from one’s global experiences and interactions with others from different backgrounds and cultures. White teachers’ working mainly with other White adults, having limited knowledge of and exposure to diverse cultural backgrounds may contribute to disproportionate referrals and suspensions received by Students of Color, but it does not definitively explain similar patterns found among other teachers from different ethnic identities (Morris, 2005). Morris’ (2005) two-year ethnographic study of a middle school in Texas found that African American teachers in predominantly populated schools with Students of Color were more likely to discipline African American and Latinx students more frequently, while overlooking similar behaviors exhibited by White students. Morris (2005) asserted that African American teachers’ reluctance to discipline White students was “understandable, given the power that whiteness represents to these teachers” (p. 114).

Researchers have distinguished common characteristics that jeopardize Students of Color to be affected by the racial discipline gap, which are indicated by disparities in referrals between White student groups and Students of Color (Butler et al., 2012). Furthermore, students residing in high poverty or crime ridden areas, in which they might be exposed to and influenced by violence, are unduly affected by the discipline gap in school (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott 2012; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Townsend, 2000). Being a Student of Color, being
male, being African American or Latinx, or a student with a history of low academic achievement also contributes to overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline practices (Butler et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2010; Townsend, 2000). Reasons for overrepresentation with exclusionary discipline practices are speculated to emanate from dissimilar language patterns, social class and cultural differences between teachers and Students of Color and poor students as school-based factors (Haight et al., 2016). Because of the race and class differences, actions and behaviors of Students of Color may be misinterpreted by educators, increasing students’ risk for behavior referrals or suspensions (Townsend, 2000).

Beyond disciplinary referrals, some teachers’ lack of cultural competence and deficit thinking contributes to differences in expectations and perceptions of what constitutes “appropriate” school behaviors (Chu, 2011). For example, students whose cultures highly value socialization and a sense of family and community may prefer to socialize while completing tasks (Townsend, 2000). Teachers may view this as disruptive behavior or as insubordination (Townsend, 2000). African American females are often affected by this as their behaviors have been documented to be seen as disruptive or disobedient in the classroom (Francis, 2012). This type of offense has been grounds for a student’s removal from the classroom, thereby causing alienation, the development of negative school perspectives, and perpetuating academic failure (McCray, Beachum, & Yawn, 2015; Townsend, 2000).

Conclusion

Teachers’ negative perceptions of Students of Color and economically disadvantaged students permeates multiple school system areas. Organizational culture can support or hinder students’ academic, social, emotional, and behavioral progress, depending upon the common beliefs and practices of staff, students, families, and other stakeholders (Tomlinson & Jarvis,
A negative organizational culture may fuel racial and class division, engendering negative appraisals of students’ abilities and behaviors (Weinstein et al., 2004). Positive culture adjustments, such as fostering productive, trusting student-teacher interactions may stimulate teachers to overcome biased perceptions (Weinstein et al., 2004). Building co-constructed experiences may also help reduce discipline gaps (Butler et al., 2012). Classroom cultures and practices that promote student equity can, therefore, reduce both achievement and discipline gaps (Fletcher et al., 2011; Weinstein et al., 2004).

**Teachers’ Expectations of Students of Color and Low Socioeconomic Status Students**

Teachers’ perceptions of students refer to teachers’ associations of students’ demographic variables (Hughes et al., 2005). This includes teachers’ ways of understanding or interpreting students’ social assets as well as their assumptions and opinions regarding them (Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Teachers form their expectations for students’ performance based on their perceptions of students’ abilities (Hughes et al., 2005). It is believed that students’ academic successes are attributed, in part, to the expectations held by their classroom teachers (Glock & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2014; Peterson et al., 2016; Pringle et al. 2010; Sorhagen, 2013).

Research has identified a number of factors that may affect Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged achievement gaps (Nan & Zia, 2011; Pringle et al., 2010; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). One potential contributor is the higher set of expectations for White, middle class students compared to other groups (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Ferguson, 2003). While research confirms that Students of Color and economically disadvantaged students do consistently underperform in comparison to their Caucasian peers (Nan & Zia, 2011; Pringle et al. 2010; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014; Williams, 2011), no consensus has been reached on teacher expectations as a definitive contributing factor to the phenomenon.
Teacher expectations and student performance are intertwined and hold a cyclical relationship as both positive and negative expectations are thought to influence student performance and student performance may also influence teacher expectations. Rather than supporting and challenging all students to reach their potential, many teachers instead assume that Students of Color and poor students are less capable of producing higher level work. Perhaps this is why many teacher assumptions, though based on stereotypes, are considered accurate predictors of academic outcomes (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; de Boer, Bosker, & van der Werf, 2010; Glock, 2016), particularly when student behaviors “confirm stereotypical expectations” (Glock, 2016, p. 494).

**Effects and Teacher Expectation Bias**

Several researchers cite Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1969) *Pygmalion in the Classroom* as a pivotal empirical study on the impact of teacher expectations and classroom bias on students; specifically, the study sought to discover the effect of teacher prejudices on student achievement (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; de Boer et al., 2010; Fischbach et al., 2013; Lopez, 2017; Sorhagen, 2013). Researchers found that students flourished with positive expectations and feedback, regardless of ethnicity or social status (de Boer et al., 2010). Students internalize higher expectations set by their teachers, exceeding achievement thresholds otherwise considered impossible for Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (Rist, 1970/2000). This and other research accentuate the importance of high expectations for all students (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; de Boer et al., 2010; Rist, 1970/2000; Termes Lopez, 2017). Removing ethnic and racial stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs of student capability is as critical as teacher awareness of their own beliefs and those promulgated by society.
Termes Lopez (2017) focused on the Galatea Effect, similar to the Pygmalion Effect in that its focus is on expectations. The fundamental difference between the two is that the Pygmalion Effect focuses on teacher expectations, whereas the Galatea Effect emphasizes the power of self-expectations (Termes Lopez, 2017). Positive self-expectations from the Galatea Effect is the internal belief that one can achieve excellence based on one’s own expectations, increasing one’s chances of reaching high expectations (Termes Lopez, 2017). Educators could support and assist students in meeting their expectations through positive reinforcement (Termes Lopez, 2017). But research has demonstrated that teacher interactions with students varies depending on the child, context, and often, social categories (Beckett & Wrigley, 2014; Pringle et al., 2010; Termes Lopez, 2017). Even though stigmatized groups were found to be more susceptible to lower performance due to underestimations of ability (de Boer et al., 2010), children have been found to be resilient, capable of developing strategies to compensate for unequal treatment (Termes Lopez, 2017). Research has demonstrated that stigmatized and marginalized students can perceive unfair actions and offer responses based upon character, a demonstration of their resilience (Termes Lopez, 2017). Students themselves report that teacher expectations indicate that race, ethnicity, and poverty are viable factors in determining the interactions between students and teachers and the expectations set by educators for different subgroups of students (Pringle et al., 2010).

de Boer, Bosker, and van der Werf (2010) describe teacher expectation bias as “the difference between observed and predicted teacher expectation” (p. 168). A type of socioeconomic IQ relationship has been suggested (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999), and in fact, teachers may use students’ social class information and prior achievement data to determine expectations for students. The biased track appears appropriate because student achievement
seems to match their placement (de Boer et al., 2010). African American students perceive the misaligned expectations as a lack of support or dislike for them as students (Pringle et al., 2010). This perception is strongly associated with negative school and teacher associations, sometimes resulting in behavioral difficulties that further strain the relationship and produce the expected lower academic outcomes (Pringle et al., 2010).

Teachers’ expectations for student academic performance have a strong influence on developing social hierarchies in the classroom as well (Rist, 1970/2000). In a group of students studied over a fourteen-year period beginning in preschool, Alvidrez and Weinstein (1999) found that teachers’ cognitive ability judgments of students prior to kindergarten entry formed predictive relationships with achievement throughout the course of the study. Teachers’ negative perceptions of students’ abilities were strongest in relation to their IQ scores and weakest in children from “career-oriented homes” (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999, p. 741). Teachers use of external and internal factors such as a student’s appearance, familial information, past performance data, a student’s perceived work ethic, social behavior, and maturity influence academic decisions made in the classroom (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Teachers’ use of criteria not specifically linked to demonstrated academic competence places students into differentiated instructional pathways or tracks based on misattributions (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Teachers also use language, behavior cues, coursework, and assessments that communicate the pecking order, which may then be interpreted by students and internalized, influencing their motivation and school effort (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).

**Tracking**

Emerging educational concepts, demographic shifts, and increased educator and school district accountability have changed teaching and learning (Montoya, Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo,
The shifts were aimed at reducing the achievement gap between student subgroups (Peterson et al., 2016), but the hyper-focus on high-stakes standardized testing outcomes has been detrimental to Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Weinstein et al., 2004). When aware of stereotypical expectations, marginalized student groups underperform during high-pressure testing conditions, such as standardized testing situations (Weinstein et al., 2004). Rising from the achievement culture are specialized courses for selected students, chosen for advanced and accelerated coursework designed to increase proficiency and mastery rates (Ferguson, 2003). Specialized coursework may come in the form of remediation, advanced, or accelerated courses. These courses have existed for some time, but high-stakes testing is also associated with teacher, principal, school, and district accountability that can result in funding losses following low student test results (Cheesman & De Pry, 2010). Teachers are less likely to recognize the abilities, strengths, and potential of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, partially as a result of poor high-stakes testing performance, focusing instead on issues and areas of weakness (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). The excellence gap is derived from low participation in higher level, specialized coursework by Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Swanson, 2006).

The excellence gap refers to achievement disparities between subgroups of the highest performing students (Swanson, 2006; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Classroom teachers fail to refer Students of Color and poor students for advanced or enrichment coursework, contributing to the underrepresentation of a more diverse population of students in higher level coursework tracks (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). In one study, forty-eight African American high school seniors shared their experiences with teachers who either dissuaded them from taking advanced courses or did not include them in honors or advanced placement program options (Pringle et al., 2016).
Both scenarios describe missed educational opportunities for Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged student groups.

Tracking is a school-based construct that uses multiple factors to determine student aptitude at varying levels of subject difficulty (Williams, 2011). It is posited that the system of tracking serves mainly middle class White students, considering and overvaluing the cultural capital of this subgroup of students (Montoya, Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo, 2016). Tracking as a practice is a concern as many Students of Color are overrepresented in low-track classes (Burris & Welner, 2005). Some researchers contend that tracking is ineffective, often leading to lower level placement for Students of Color and poor students (Burris & Welner, 2005; Montoya et al., 2016; Williams, 2011). Because so few of these students are represented in higher level coursework, their opportunities are accordingly limited (Weinstein et al., 2004), becoming a system that locks students into lower rungs as early as elementary school (Williams, 2011). Lowered elementary school expectations have had a subsequent direct impact on students beyond elementary, middle, and high school (Weinstein et al., 2004). Burris and Welner’s (2005) study focused on a Long Island school district that opted to de-track all of its students as well as teach all students using the pre-International Baccalaureate curriculum. These researchers found that de-tracking students, increased participation of Students of Color in advanced math courses and increased the volume of district Regents diplomas, a form of diploma required to graduate from high school in New York State, as well as a diminishing achievement gap (Burris & Welner, 2005). De-tracking in this district demonstrated that all students can grow from the use of high-track curriculum, including students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and Students of Color (Burris & Welner, 2005).

**Deficit Paradigm**
Educators who categorize student capability based on race and socioeconomic status (Chu, 2011; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014) have created and contributed to the deficit paradigm. Within the deficit paradigm, it is believed that differing intellectual and temperamental qualities are inherited (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014) and inalterable. Perceived poor social skills, academic competence, and behaviors within non-dominant student groups have negative consequences when linked to teacher expectations, exacerbating and maintaining the existing educational gaps (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Put simply, within the deficit paradigm, lower expectations lead directly to lower class tracks (Rist, 1970/2000). Pringle and colleagues (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews with forty-eight African American high school students and found that the students believed teacher expectations were associated with ethnicity, and they felt teachers were not invested in African American students’ success. The students interviewed compared approximate levels of teacher support for African American students with other subgroups of students and reached a conclusion similar to that of other studies: teachers hold higher expectations for White students, and lower expectations for Students of Color (Glock, 2016; Pringle et al., 2010; Sorhagen, 2013).

Another study, conducted by Rist (1970/2000), observed students in an urban school from one kindergarten class and followed those students through their second grade school year. The kindergarten teacher grouped students according to ability on the eighth day of school. Rist (1970/2000) explained that each year, subsequent classroom teachers held expectations based upon the same, previous kindergarten ability grouping. As the study continued, Rist (1970/2000) found that students who were perceived to have the greatest scholastic aptitude were placed in the highest achieving group. This group remained static (without others entering or leaving it) from the eighth day of kindergarten into their second grade year (Rist, 1970/2000). Rist
(1970/2000) noted some minor movement of student placements between the middle and lower achieving groups from the beginning of kindergarten into students’ second grade school year. The initial judgments and groupings, therefore, had significant, subsequent implications on teachers’ curricular decisions and behavioral assumptions. The ability groups for students established either high or low expectations for kindergarten students, impacting students’ access to educational opportunities and quality education. Finally, Rist’s (1970/2000) study found that students identified as holding lower academic potential on the eighth day of kindergarten were locked into lower ability tracks for at least two consecutive years.

**Conclusion**

It has been surmised that teacher expectations are a potentially strong contributor to the growing achievement divide (Howard, 2003; Pringle et al., 2010; Rist, 1970/2000; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014; Williams, 2011). Teachers’ beliefs and academic standards, when based upon race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic group, could have cumulative and substantially devastating effects on the futures of these students (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; de Boer et al., 2010). Alvidrez and Weinstein (1999) found that teacher judgments regarding students’ cognitive abilities had a predictive relationship with school achievement fourteen years later, which is similar to de Boer and colleagues (2010) findings where there was evidence of teacher expectation bias influencing high school students’ academic achievement due to inaccurate teacher expectations. Underestimation of student abilities based upon assumptions of fixed circumstances creates a systematic deficit paradigm and expectation bias (de Boer et al., 2010).

The educational system represents the values and ideologies of the dominant group, and they are mirrored in our institutional frameworks and practices as well (Chu, 2011; Love, 2015). This White hegemony limits the intellectual opportunities and broadens the achievement gap for
students who do not belong to the dominant group (Chu, 2011). Providing access to challenging curriculum would elevate the expectations and maximize achievement for Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged student groups.

**Self-fulfilling Prophecy**

It has been said that teachers can accurately predict student achievement. The question of whether a teacher’s prognosis is accurate because of correct assessment or if it is the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy based upon the original assessment is difficult to determine (Glock et al., 2014). Self-fulfilling educational prophecy can occur when teachers predict how students will perform academically. The foretelling may result in whole or part materialization of the prediction as a result of altered student behaviors and actions, or following verbal or behavioral feedback, leading the student to conclude that the foretelling was true (Lopez, 2017). Self-fulfilling prophecy may be the deciding factor in some student outcomes and future successes. Many researchers have substantiated that students’ successes hinge on the potential identified and communicated to students by their teachers, both verbal and nonverbal communication, by means of self-fulfilling prophecy (Fischbach et al., 2013; Hayes, Montes, & Schroeder, 2013; Lopez, 2017; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Rist, 1970/2000; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004; Zimmerman, 2017). Researchers, however, are unable to conclude whether the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy accumulate or dissipate with time (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Fischbach et al. 2013).

**Asset-based Judgments in Self-Fulfilling Prophecies**

Before students even begin school, teachers make judgments on their personalities, behaviors, social abilities, and academic prowess. For years, scholarly researchers have sought to define both the determining factors and the accuracy of these judgments. Research does suggest,
however, that teachers base their judgments on subjective social criteria (Delpit, 1992; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; O’Connor, 2001; Rist, 1970/2000). Student records are often shared with teachers prior to students’ entry in the classroom. The records contain prior academic achievements, family background (including educational attainment of parents), and comments written by former teachers (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 2009; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Rist, 1970/2000). Much of the information within the records is subjective, based upon various assessments, appraisal criteria, and teachers’ own valuation of student character in comparison with their personal representation of academic success (Rist, 1970/2000). Social stratification increases when teachers consciously or subconsciously assume that students from higher socioeconomic status families have greater potential than those from less affluent families (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Rist, 1970/2000). When this occurs, students from lower classes tend to suffer the loss of academic opportunities because of the decisions made based on misattributions of ability (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Rist, 1970/2000).

Other factors, such as race and gender, may influence teachers’ decisions (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Rist’s study (1970/2000) determined that teachers have a “normative reference group” that forms assumptions of an ideal student’s demeanor and scholarship. According to this study, educators believed that an ideal student has high verbal skills, interacts easily with adults, possesses leadership qualities, maintains a neat, clean appearance, and comes from an educated and intact family structure (Rist, 1970/2000). These attributes stem from a White middle class ideology. Rist (1970/2000) found that this normative group coincided closely with the type of group the teacher participated in as an adult and in their childhoods (Rist, 1970/2000). When teachers ascribe higher status and capability assessment to students who fit this normative reference group, this disadvantages Students of Color discounting African
American and Latinx students’ abilities, often placing them in lower ability grouping tracks (Hayes et al., 2013). These misplacements occur even when the achievement outcomes of Students of Color are equal to those of their White peers (Weinstein et al., 2004). When historically marginalized students are aware of stereotypes, they underperform in high stakes testing conditions (Lopez, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004), experience higher dropout rates, and lower college matriculation and graduation rates (Hayes et al., 2013). Racial and class differences between predominantly White teachers and diverse student groups may negatively contribute to appraisals of differing ability, confirming negative self-fulfilling prophecies (Weinstein et al., 2004).

**Teacher Judgments and Students’ Self-fulfilling Prophecies**

Decisions about students’ academic potential are based on several factors, including prior performance, social, and behavioral assets (Lopez, 2017), which in turn helps determine educational quality and quantity for each child (Rist, 1970/2000). Research has demonstrated that teachers are more likely to base decisions regarding students’ capabilities on limited social and behavioral cues (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012), biased by race, ethnicity, social class, and societal stereotypes (Lopez, 2017; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Not all teachers are aware of their own biases, nor do they realize the impact on students (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) who do not possess the character traits, attributes, or cultural capital considered necessary for academic success (Rist, 1970/2000). These crucial decisions may be implicit or explicit, can influence the quality and methods of education, and are known to have lasting effects on the students themselves, creating either negative or positive self-fulfilling prophecies (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).
In the elementary school years, students learn content, but they also develop awareness of who they are as people and as learners within the school community. Students as young as first grade are capable of detecting differential treatment from their teachers (Weinstein et al., 2004). Classrooms are filled with students of variable abilities, cultures, backgrounds, experiences, races, and ethnicities. It is within these classroom settings where differences often become salient through differentiated instructional methods that are intended to advance students based on their current developmental abilities (Weinstein et al., 2004). While good intentions exist, the use of these differentiated groupings shows students what their teachers believe their academic capabilities to be. The message of superiority or inferiority may have cumulative consequences for students across educational trajectories by restricting some groups’ access to rigorous curricula (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 2009; Lopez, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004). Differential treatment maintains the lower academic achievement levels for oppressed student subgroups, making upward mobility from lower ranged groupings challenging, if not impossible (Fischbach, Baudson, Preckel, Martin, Brunner, 2013; Rist, 1970/2000). Differential opportunities then condition and socialize students with lower expectations, conveying teachers’ beliefs of their academic potential (Lopez, 2017; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Rist, 1970/2000). Weinstein, Gregory, and Strambler (2004) found that, by fifth grade, the effects of teacher expectancy were mediated by students’ own expectancies, reinforcing the internalization of negative self-fulfilling prophecies. This evidence suggests that students recognize the differential treatment between students perceived as more intelligent in the elementary school years and recognize the differences between more challenging and basic work (Weinstein et al., 2004). These expectancies create distinctive pathways that heighten either positive or negative self-fulfilling
prophecies, depending on the track one was placed in, affecting student learning and future educational opportunities.

Fischbach and colleagues (2013) conducted a forty-year longitudinal study using a nationally representative random data set of 2,824 sixth grade students in 1968 where each student took an intelligence test and their teachers completed a questionnaire reporting each student’s grades and judged students’ intelligence. Teacher judgments primarily based on student grade point averages were found to be predictors of students’ success forty years later (Fischbach et al., 2013). Student grades were a product of subjective judgment, which has been consistent with teachers’ appraisals of their students’ achievement (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999). Further, Fischbach and his colleagues (2013) found that the teacher judgments were correlated with self-fulfilling prophecies, and have affected students’ educational pathways, cognitive development, future socioeconomic achievement, and health – all mediated by educational attainment.

Impact on Students and their Achievement

Students’ self-fulfilling prophecies may be a result of teachers’ conditioning by way of high or low expectations for students (Hayes et al., 2013). Lowered expectations, often based upon stereotypes, may trigger students’ self-fulfilling prophecies, which guides their academic trajectory (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Fischbach and colleagues (2013) also found that overestimation of student ability and high expectations do not produce negative effects. Conversely, lowered expectations, coupled with underestimated abilities, may create stigmas that negatively impact students’ self-fulfilling prophecies, life, and livelihood prospects (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). This was found to be particularly accurate for socioeconomically disadvantaged students, projecting a negative haze over their perceived abilities, and limiting opportunities for academic success (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). It is through these negative self-
fulfilling prophecies that create a cyclical pattern of lowered expectations, followed by low quality student output, that students are placed in a lower academic track (Weinstein et al., 2004). Once a student has entered into a lower track, and holds a negative self-fulfilling prophecy, the cycle repeats again and again with lowered expectations (Weinstein et al., 2004). At the core of students’ fulfillment of lowered expectations may be the initial negative teacher judgments they experience early in their educational careers.

Teachers’ perceptions and student capability judgments have the potential to change student behavior (Zimmerman, 2017). In Weinstein, Gregory, and Strambler’s (2004) study, high school students evaluated teachers’ judgments, and found some to be biased, unfair, and uncaring. As a result, students in the study became less cooperative in class and exhibited more defiant behaviors (Weinstein et al., 2004). Students develop academic self-constructs through their interpretation of teacher interactions (Lopez, 2017). When bias permeates education, there is an increased risk of underestimating Students of Color and poor students’ potential (Rist, 1970/2000), and of assigning them to a subculture that they will recognize as the “smart” or “not-as-smart” student group (Weinstein et. al., 2004). This can lead to differential relationships with teachers, disconnects between students and education, limited educational options, and increased school dropout rates (Lopez, 2017; Rist, 1970/2000). These side-effects alter students’ learning opportunities and communicate differences in competence to their peers (Rist, 1970/2000).

In contrast to much of the self-fulfilling prophecy research, Konstantopoulous (2009) found no significant teacher effects for stigmatized and marginalized students in comparison with other groups. It was determined, however, that ineffective teachers have both a short and long-term achievement impact (Konstantopoulous, 2009). Additionally, Konstantopoulous
(2009) found the cumulative achievement effects more pronounced in lower socioeconomic status schools. Therefore, when teachers communicate (verbal or nonverbal) judgments referring to student intelligence, there exists strong potential to affect student learning and educational outcomes (Fischbach et al., 2013). One may logically conclude, then, that students with more exposure to effective teachers and positive self-fulfilling prophecies tend to make greater gains in achievement. Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students were found to be most impacted, as most lived in urban areas and were not taught by effective teachers (Ferguson, 2003).

**Conclusion**

Self-fulfilling prophecies are a powerful, understudied force in education. Asset-based judgments have an adverse effect on Students of Color and poor students. Weinstein et al. (2004) stated that African Americans, in particular, are three times more likely to be classified in special education programs, 3.2 times less likely to participate in gifted and talented classes, and they are twice as likely to receive corporal punishment or suspension. This illuminates a major concern about the educational experiences of this student subgroup. If teacher expectancies can potentially influence student outcomes (more so for Students of Color and poor student groups), and negative, self-fulfilling prophecies create or perpetuate unequal educational opportunities for subgroups of students that lead to a “negative self-image and devaluing and delegitimizing school as a means for social mobility” (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 514), then major shifts in educator training and classroom instruction are necessary.

“The individual becomes so by means of self-fulfilling prophecy” speaks volumes about the need for teachers to consider their biases, assumptions, and acceptance of the stereotypes that infiltrate the school environment (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 71). Self-fulfilling prophecies indicate
that when students believe they possess a quality because others have indicated they possess it, they are then more likely to demonstrate that quality (Zimmerman, 2017). Teachers must consider the ramifications and impact of their interactions with students, and take care to project competent, capable, supportive messaging in school to afford students more favorable outcomes. Data shows high risks associated with negative, self-fulfilling prophecies; they impact marginalized subgroups in both short and long-term capacities (Fischbach et al., 2013). Attention to the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies can be mediated through cultural responsiveness and integration (Lopez, 2017) across content areas and through critical education decisions that prioritize consistent, high expectations for all students. When planning for individual, small, or whole group lessons, teachers must consider their students’ cultural contexts (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007) and work to promote enrichment experiences for all Students of Color and poor students, nurturing their talents and gifts (Weinstein et al., 2004). Students must be taught to become masters of their own destinies, and teachers can support that by modeling high, supportive expectations for all groups that demonstrate the worth and value of the individual to develop positive self-fulfilling prophecies.

Summary

The rapid influx of immigrants in the United States has drastically changed from the early 1970s into the new millennium (Nan et al., 2011). These shifts in demographics affect the landscape of American schools and the needs of students. The convergence of pluralistic populations into schools requires educational institutions and classroom teachers to have a firm grasp on culturally responsive teaching tenets that draw upon students’ character and strengths (Zimmerman, 2017) with mindful inclusion of them in the curriculum’s learning opportunities. In lieu of placing value on diverse student cultures and perspectives, White hegemonic hierarchy
will continue, perpetuating the underachievement of Students of Color (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Because achievement gaps remain among all socioeconomic groups, as well as rural, urban, and suburban groups (including well-resourced, middle class African American students with similar educational levels as their White peers), it is evident that schools and districts must seek alternative solutions to mitigate and rectify the damage caused by this injustice (Pringle et al., 2010).

School diversity is often viewed as an integration problem, rather than as a celebratory opportunity for learning and growth (Weinstein et al., 2004). School social contexts are not always culturally responsive, and because of this, have been known to damage relationships between students, families, and educators (Fletcher et al., 2011; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). The concept and definition of intelligence, both how it appears and how it manifests in children, must be redefined to be inclusive of all student groups (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2007). Historically, underserved and marginalized student groups are often excluded from participating in higher level coursework and experience lowered teacher expectations, affecting academic opportunities and overall performance.

Teachers’ perceptions and expectations can shape students’ intellectual development. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed the researcher to focus deeply on a few teachers’ personal journeys and experiences, as well as their interactions with and perceptions of diverse student populations, contributing significantly to the limited qualitative literature on the topic. Teacher recognition of the implicit and explicit messages communicated verbally and nonverbally to students and their impact on Students of Color and low socioeconomic student groups must be brought to the forefront of conscious, critical awareness. Through reflective practice, educators may realize the value in working to recognize and interrupt biases,
assumptions, prejudices, stereotypes, and deficit thinking (Irizarry, 2015). Reflection and revision of teacher belief systems has been shown to shift their student perceptions toward a less discriminatory light (Termes Lopez, 2017), increasing expectations for Students of Color and poor students (Glock, 2017).

This study used cultural capital theory as a framework to begin to better understand the development of teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students’ through their experiences, interactions, assumptions, and biases involving these subgroups. This investigation uncovered potential inequities in education for these subgroups of students by unearthing teacher gaps in cultural competence and biases that infiltrated the academic decision-making process for Students of Color and poor students at the elementary school level. Fletcher and colleagues (2011) stated that organizations must become more inclusive in “acknowledging, valuing, and respecting the cultural capital that students from nonmainstream cultures bring to their learning” so all students can become successful (p.123). This research offers insight into making this recommendation come to fruition.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis was to understand how elementary school teachers viewed and perceived Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. The research questions were designed to explore teachers’ evolving assumptions of students’ cultural capital, grounded in teachers’ interpretations of the value of one’s social assets, conceptions of self, and of prevailing sociopolitical forces around them. The research questions were:

**Primary Research Question**

How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?

**Subquestion**

How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making?

The primary research question explored the value elementary teachers placed upon students’ racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors as determinants of academic potential. The subquestion will allow the researcher to examine how the social assets of students related to perceptions of their social capital and the value that was placed upon students’ cultural capital in influencing academic decisions made by elementary teachers whose students’ races, ethnicities, and classes differed from their own. The questions allowed the researcher to understand how elementary teachers made sense of their backgrounds, sociopolitical forces, belief systems, and the social assets of their students. The existing literature and knowledge field were primarily quantitative and outcomes-based, hence, a qualitative analysis of teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students contributed new understandings that
delved deeper into the thought process and interactions of teachers with diverse student groups holding differing backgrounds and experiences (Jester & Fickel, 2013; Meissel, Meyer, Yao, Rubie-Davies, 2017; Obach, 2003; Ready & Wright, 2011; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006).

The significance of this research lies in two simple statistics: approximately eighty percent of the teaching force hails from a White middle class background, and yet, more than fifty percent of the student population consists of Students of Color, and many of them are from low socioeconomic status homes (Ford, 2010; Jester & Fickel, 2013). Views about educational success are shaped by individuals’ positionalities, stemming from their life experiences and beliefs regarding appropriate cultural behaviors and outcomes (Banks, 2007). As a result of approximately three quarters of the teaching forces’ backgrounds and cultures differing from those of their students (Ford, 2010), many adopt a deficit mentality towards students who are culturally dissimilar to their own circumstances (Singleton & Hays, 2008; Sklra & Scheurich, 2004).

In the most recent literature, studies have sought to prove or disprove that Students of Color and poor students are disadvantaged within the educational system, seeking to identify the root causes of low academic performance and posit possible solutions (Glock & Krolak Schwerdt 2014, 2015). Some have identified motivational issues within students, families, and cultures, assigning blame to Students of Color and poor students, releasing institutions and society from contributing accountability to subgroups’ underachievement or differential experiences (Goode, 1997; Obach, 2003). This work may have implications for teacher training, focusing on social barriers, the infiltration of negative stereotypes into the educational setting, and how educators’ perceptions may shape educational experiences and outcomes of students.
This begins with an overview of the qualitative research approach. The paradigm anchoring this study is identified, and the inquiry’s specific guiding strategy is explained. A description of the participants, procedures, and data analysis will follow, and transparency is disclosed. Finally, the ethical considerations of this study, credibility, transferability, and self-reflexivity brings the chapter to a close before the study’s limitations are revealed.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

**Research Paradigm**

To reach a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the research problem, the researcher used a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm as the foundation of the study (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm presents a dynamic view of the world, considering a variety of perspectives and assumptions to make meaning of people’s experiences within the world (Merriam, 1991). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm emphasizes the co-construction of meaning as a blend of the multiple realities seen through the eyes of the participants, as well as the researcher (Merriam, 1991; Ponterotto, 2005). Participants’ meanings are derived from their beliefs, which form their perceptions (Merriam, 1991). The subjective realities of the participants and the researcher will merge through dialogue, reflection, and interactions with one another. The researcher anchored this work within the context of participants’ specific lived experiences to better understand the historical and cultural settings and conditions impacting the phenomenon and the construction of meaning (Creswell, 2014). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm that anchored this study required a qualitative research approach to examine this complex problem of practice (Merriam, 1991).

**Overview of Qualitative Research**
Qualitative research is used to explore and make meaning of a question or an issue (Creswell, 2014), and to describe the manner in which participants understand situations, opinions, and experiences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), and how they interpret and assign meaning to their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative researchers investigate the “how” and the “why” aspects of the phenomenon, rather than the “what,” “where,” and “when” seen in quantitative data (Butin, 2010). This allows for a richer, deeper understanding that is difficult to extract using quantitative methods due to constraints by pre-determined categories (Butin, 2010). Researchers using a qualitative methodology must rely on their interactions with participants to generate non-numerical data in written text, using language as the main form of data (Miles et al., 2014). Ongoing contact, in a naturalistic setting, between the researcher and participants allow the researcher to gain a more holistic sense of the phenomenon studied (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher must focus on participant experiences (Miles et al., 2014), as well as to exercise reflexivity (Chenail, 1995; Miles et al., 2014). Reflexivity requires the researcher to consider individual positionality, culture, and experiences, and to overtly disclose them, as they may shape the direction of the study and influence interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

Flexibility and openness are the cornerstones of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). An emergent design allows the researcher to shift and modify the research plan as needed, based on the data collected and additional information necessary to address the research question in deeper detail (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Instead of valuing control and using the large sample sizes of quantitative research, qualitative methods purposefully select a smaller number of participants and sites to specifically address the research question, and deliberately focus on the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers are data collectors, often
using a protocol specifically designed to address the research question and to establish data collection guidelines (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research is considered an inductive endeavor in which the researcher focuses on individual participant responses, interpreting meanings to identify themes and subthemes (Creswell, 2014). Constructivist-interpretivists add an additional layer of complexity with their belief in constantly changing and multiple versions of reality, seen through different participant lenses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By contrast, quantitative researchers view reality as sole truth, fixed and measurable (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Multiple systems of inquiry are used in qualitative research, including narrative, case study, interpretative phenomenological analysis, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Miles et al., 2014).

The numerous qualitative data collection types include, but are not limited to, participant observation, analyses of documents and audiovisual material, writing memos, and a variety of interview structures (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To analyze the text and image data, researchers begin with inductive analysis, dissecting the data and assigning codes or themes, sorting and resorting their coded material within each file to seek common sequences, relationships, categories, and patterns (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Idiographic interpretation focuses attention on the particulars of individual participants (Creswell, 2014). Deductive data analysis follows, in which researchers examine data using themes that emerged from it to determine if additional collection is needed to support or clarify the themes (Creswell, 2014). Following identification of useful data, concepts and themes are displayed and combined to draw conclusions (Miles et al., 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These conclusions are then verified by the researcher (Miles et al., 2014).
Because qualitative research is based on assumptions using descriptive words or pictures, extracted from participants’ perceptions and experiences, clear process and product focuses should be communicated to readers (Creswell, 2014). It is important to note that in qualitative research, the researcher’s interpretation is positioned within the data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Researchers bring their own positionalities into their work, which are based on the cultural, social, gender, class, historical, and political contexts of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). When sharing qualitative research, Chenail (1995) cites four ideas to support researchers’ “mounds of data and analysis” conversion to clear, coherent methods for the reader: openness, data as star, juxtaposition, and data presentation strategies.

The first of Chenail’s (1995) suggestions is openness and transparency. It is important that researchers identify how their vision or understanding of the research problem is influenced by their positionality (Arnd-Caddigan & Pozzuto, 2008). When communicating researcher assumptions, logic, and decisions while research is conducted provides a level of openness and transparency that allows readers to examine the research activities and the “method-creation process” (Chenail, 1995). Researchers’ methods and activities should be presented through story, a critical component of demonstrating openness that also increases the value, validity, and quality of interactions between readers and researcher, because it allows readers to examine the particulars of the study (Chenail, 1995; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Next, it is suggested that data should be the star, meaning that the focus of the research is on high-quality data that is presented for others, to not only view, but also to “re-view” (Chenail, 1995). This requires the researcher to position the data from its natural collection setting and context to provide situational validity for readers (Chenail, 1995).
Chenail (1995) emphasizes the need to juxtapose data excerpts with the researcher’s data discussion. He recommends using a recognizable pattern throughout the analysis section to convey simplicity in a section of the research that can be very complex. This data juxtaposition should include references to the literature with descriptions, explanations, and analysis, while maintaining the primary focus on the data (Chenail, 1995).

Finally, Chenail (1995) recommends purposeful selection of presentation strategy (he lists a number of data presentation strategies that are not meant to be exclusive). Some of the outlined strategies include sharing data in excerpts that resemble the research phenomenon, starting with the simplest, and progressing to more complex aspects of study, or to chronicle the researcher’s personal journey. Each of the presentation strategies lend themselves to viewing the data differently, depending on the researcher’s preference and how they want data to unfold before the reader.

**Strategy of Inquiry**

The strategy of inquiry must align with the research problem, a qualitative approach, as well as the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is the strategy chosen to examine how a selected group of teachers make sense of their life experiences, in their own terms, as they explore their perceptions of students whose races, ethnicities, and classes differ from their own (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is a qualitative approach used to build understanding of how people make sense of their lives, relationships, processes, and worldly experiences, as well as what and how they attribute meaning to phenomena through those experiences (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).
IPA methodology focuses on the researcher to gain a sense of individuals’ experiences, seen from the participant’s point of view in an experiential manner. IPA researchers seek to understand the significance of events and experiences participants have gone through as they engage with their own reflections, giving each participant a voice to share in them (Smith et al., 2009). As participants share their personal accounts and reflections, the researcher plays an active role in the research process by interpretation of the accounts to understand participants’ experiences. Therefore, the researcher engages in a double hermeneutics approach by seeking to interpret how individuals self-interpret “events, objects, and people in their lives” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 362) and situating those meanings within the personal contexts in which they are given (Larkin et al., 2011). This exploration of lived experiences is conjoined with subjective and reflective practices using interpretation, gaining the participant’s “personal world” perspective (Smith & Osborn, 2008), while recognizing that this cannot be perfectly achieved (Dowling, 2007; Larkin et al., 2011; Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

IPA is grounded in language; as it is the primary tool for communication on individual reflections to express meaning and experiences to the researcher (Oxley, 2016). IPA researchers believe that to understand the world, you must first understand a person’s experiences within it and how they relate to the world (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Although researchers reflect upon their own experiences as they interpret participants’ events and occurrences, these interpretations are grounded in the participant’s perspectives and beliefs.

Through the incorporation of elements from phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012), theoretical underpinnings are threefold. Edmund Husserl is credited with the development of the phenomenological movement. Phenomenology seeks to investigate the essence of a phenomenon, the study of being, the
existence, or experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2012), in detail and in-depth. To be able to isolate the essential components of a phenomenon, researchers must engage in phenomenological reduction, which requires the researcher to bracket her assumptions, preconceptions, and pre-existing knowledge to allow the aspects of the phenomenon under investigation to be revealed through the course of the research (Larkin et al., 2011; Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

IPA studies, however, recognize that our world involvement influences our observations, situates and causes them to be interpretative, therefore lacking phenomenological reduction (Dowling, 2007). The aspects of the phenomenon are described in detail using intentionality, focusing on the relationship between what is experienced and how it is experienced (Larkin et al., 2011).

A Husserl follower, Martin Heidegger, further developed Husserl’s conceptions by layering hermeneutics, the study of interpretation, with the study of lived experiences. This addition of interpreting others’ experiences to “understand what it is like to stand in the shoes of the subject (although recognizing this is never completely possible) and through interpretative activity make meaning comprehensible by translating it” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 362) is a central component of IPA research and is a distinguishing characteristic between phenomenology and IPA studies. The dual interpretations involved in IPA are inextricably interconnected. The double hermeneutic approach recognizes that the researcher’s interpretative activity of participant experiences (situated within contexts) are presented and interpreted within the researcher’s ways of knowing.

Idiography is the third theoretical orientation involved in IPA studies. It focuses on specific details in each individual study, rather than universal and general meanings. The idiographic belief is that each study holds merit and value, and that findings should not be generalized, but remain individualized for each case study (Oxley, 2016). This is not to say that
participants’ responses within a given study are not compared to seek important patterns or themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). There is a specific focus on how particular experiences are understood from the individual perspective.

The IPA methodology has roots in phenomenology, with overlapping similarities and vast distinctions between the two. Phenomenology is the study of consciousness; its principal tenet is intentionality (Dowling, 2007). According to Husserl, Phenomenology is the unbiased study of the structure of various types of experiences, with the experience directed towards or about something as understood in the human consciousness (Dowling, 2007). The phenomenon is understood through the descriptions as they arise in individual consciousness. This study of existence and experience is believed to be tainted by researchers’ lived experiences and understandings. In order to suspend researchers’ assumptions, they must be bracketed off through phenomenological reduction (Dowling, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Bracketing is believed to lead the researcher back to a sole focus on the phenomenon studied (Larkin et al., 2011). While both Phenomenology and IPA approaches study individuals’ conscious experiences from the first-person perspective, IPA is different in that while researchers want to enter into the participant’s world, it is understood that this cannot be done completely (Smith & Osborn, 2012). IPA researchers recognize that understandings become complicated by the researcher’s own conceptions and through the interpretative process; therefore, the researcher’s conceptions are not bracketed, but instead are necessary for the interpretive process (Smith & Osborn, 2012). Movement from the descriptive to the interpretative does not claim to be objective by using strict guidelines and a formulaic procedure (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). IPA is more flexible than formulaic, grounding its work in understanding, as Phenomenology strives for objectivity. Where phenomenological research is pure description, IPA research includes a hermeneutic aspect,
which is, as van Manen (1990) stated, “outside the limits of phenomenological research” (as cited in Dowling, 2007, p. 134).

Additionally, apprehension over the cognitive focus or the perception that IPA researchers are directly studying cognitive psychology is a misconception (Larkin et al., 2011). In fact, the process of capturing participants’ perspectives and reflections using first-person accounts provides researchers access into participants’ cognition that is then interpreted by the researcher. This provides readers transparency in appreciating both the participants’ and the researcher’s sense-making, understanding, and thoughts, as much as is possible, related to the phenomenon studied. Larkin and Thompson (2012) emphasize the need to balance both the phenomenological and interpretative elements to address this concern.

A common focal point for IPA studies includes participants’ views and perceptions (Smith et al., 2009). In line with other IPA inquiries, the focus of this study is to understand participants’ experiences and their interpretations of their experiences. This research seeks to understand teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The research questions investigate individual teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of their students, and how teachers interpret their conceptions of self and the sociopolitical forces, which mold their perceptions of students from diverse backgrounds. Since the IPA approach is concerned with a detailed examination of individuals’ lived experiences expressed in their own terms, IPA, as an inquiry, is based on the interpretative processes of these individual participants, making this an appropriate methodology for this study (Smith et al., 2009). The relationship between interpretation and understanding as an active, cognitive process places the participants and the researcher as dynamic instruments within the research process (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This includes the two stages of interpretation, the double hermeneutics, in which participants
attempt to make sense of their experiences, while the researcher works to make sense of the participants’ interpretations, all leading to a commitment of better understanding the participants’ perspectives of their situations within specific contexts (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

An IPA approach loosely outlines a series of steps, applied flexibly to the study. There are a series of epistemological assumptions used to study an individual’s “relatedness to the world” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). First, for one to understand the world, one must understand experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This requires researchers to use an idiographic approach to hold a laser focus on the particulars of others’ personal accounts (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Through careful reflection upon one’s own experiences and assumptions, the research is better positioned to engage in a process of intersubjective meaning-making to recognize the role the researcher holds in interpreting participants’ views (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). With these epistemological assumptions in check, open-ended research questions focused on the exploration of individuals’ lived experiences and the particulars of individuals’ understandings within specific contexts should be crafted (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest identifying a realizable goal, objectives, or steps to demonstrate when an open-ended question has been answered. This suggestion is made to alleviate potential research question complexity with clarity to fully answer participant questions where their responses are open-ended.

Some researchers believe that the small sample size makes IPA research studies seem simple, uncomplicated, even unattractive (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012), however, a wide repertoire of skills is necessary to successfully engage in the IPA process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). But because of the demands and commitments of IPA studies, large sample sizes
are problematic, and may actually decrease the study’s quality (Smith et al., 2009). Sample sizes are typically small to allow the researcher to fully appreciate each participant’s detailed account (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA studies have been conducted between one and fifteen participants, however, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) recommend using three to six participants for novice researchers. Selected participants are purposefully homogeneous in nature and chosen to add richness to the study (Smith et al., 2009). A homogeneous sampling of participants with similar demographics and sociodemographic backgrounds creates a more closely defined group for whom the research topic will be significant (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Smaller data sets allow the researcher to engage in reflection and dialogue with participants and complete a thoughtful analysis, all of which could be inhibited with larger sample sizes (Smith et al., 2009).

Data may be collected using a variety of techniques. These include one-to-one interviews, focus groups (in which participants discuss their experiences), journals, diaries, and email dialogues (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest that researchers engage with a small sample size and give voice to participants so that they may express their stories and concerns, as well as developing ideas. IPA studies seek to hold a focus on first-person accounts of experiences and their thoughts and feelings regarding the targeted phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Semi-structured interviews allow rapport and trust to be developed, while providing space and flexibility for the researcher to probe into interesting areas based on participants’ responses (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, Smith et al., 2009, Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Data analysis follows qualitative methods, in which researchers immerse themselves in the data using a flexible approach, rather than a prescriptive one (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz &
Smith, 2012). The heart of IPA research lies within the analytic focus and a set of common processes (Smith et al., 2009). Using both emic and etic perspectives, the researcher utilizes the perspective of the participants, as well as the researcher’s (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). With focus on one case at a time, the researcher engages in a close, line-by-line analysis of each participant’s account, making notations and comments from the verbatim transcriptions (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The researcher seeks to identify patterns and emergent themes using exploratory, descriptive coding that is tied to the data (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). As the researcher explores the linguistic components of how the language is used by each participant, the researcher is led toward a more interpretative account as the meaning behind the language and interactions are considered (Smith et al., 2009). Based on the clustered themes, three to five superordinate themes or concepts are identified (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). A narrative account of the study is constructed, including verbatim extracts, taking care to clearly delineate between participants’ responses and the researcher’s interpretation of their accounts (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). This account is designed to lead the reader through the researcher’s interpretation on a theme-by-theme basis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Researcher’s reflections and connections to the literature are also included in the final analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

This research has the potential to impact the individual teachers participating in the research study as well as the cooperating district by considering education as an equitable and cultural practice. Participants and the district had the unique opportunity to learn more about how teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and poor students influenced their interactions with diverse subgroups of students. Consideration of shifting classroom practices, school and district-
wide policies, and professional development for teachers in recognizing their biases could result from this work. In addition, this research will enable scholars and practitioners alike to acquire a better understanding of educators’ interpretations of their experiences, and formational understanding of their perceptions of students within their contexts related to their educational decision making. While the findings will not be universal in generalizing professional development and systematic changes for all schools, the findings point to further study recommendations, as well as the need for districts to consider examining individuals’ positionalities to recognize their assumptions, biases, and conceptions in relation to their perceptions of students and teachers’ academic decision making. By using a part-to-whole approach, tailored and holistic support may be offered to teachers in working to overcome their biases and assumptions that cause roadblocks for subgroups of students in education, making the IPA methodology a suitable framework to seek such understandings.

Participants

Site

There were three elementary teachers as participants recruited from a suburban public school district in the northeastern United States. The school district that served as a study site had a diverse student body. Nearly forty percent of the student body were Students of Color and over forty percent were considered to be economically disadvantaged. The state defined economically disadvantaged students as those who participate in economic assistance programs, such as free or reduced lunch programs, Social Security Insurance, and other public assistance programs (NYSED Enrollment Data, n.d.). This information was significant because the participants involved in this study must have had experience in working with a diverse student population. This site was purposefully chosen because of the diverse needs of its students and the
stability of the teaching staff within the district. All teachers employed in the district held valid teaching certificates, and at least ninety percent of teachers had more than three years teaching experience (NYSED Enrollment Data, n.d.). The turnover rate of teachers within the district was less than ten percent.

**Sampling**

Smith and colleagues (2009) discussed the importance of selecting a small homogeneous sample of participants in IPA research. As key developers in the IPA methodology, the recommendation for novice researchers was three to six participants, which should “provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants, but not so many that one is in danger of being overwhelmed by the amount of data gathered” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). This was commensurate with current IPA studies in which purposive sampling with three to six participants was used (Gauntlett, Bickle, Thomas, Collings, Heaslip, Eccles, 2017; Hutchison & Kroese, 2016; Nel & Fouche, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) contended that homogeneity may vary between studies depending on the participants’ availability, willingness, and openness to discussing the investigated topic. In defining this homogeneous group, participants were White, female elementary teachers with at least three years of teaching experience, twenty-five years to fifty-five years in age. At least three years of experience working with Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students within the district was a critical factor, as these participants were able to reflect on their experiences in working with these subgroup student populations.

**Data collection**
The three participants engaged in three one-to-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour per session. Atkinson (1998) recommended that the researcher know the type of information he or she wanted to find out about the participant before beginning the interview. With this in mind, having loosely structured questions used to guide the participant to discuss her feelings and perceptions created an interactive exchange, often gleaning the most meaningful responses from participants (Atkinson, 1998). A series of six to eleven open, non-leading questions were prepared, accompanied by follow up prompts (See Appendix G, Appendix H, & Appendix I), in advance of each interview, to promote expansive dialogue (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The interviews were structured to be primarily narrative and descriptive, as well as containing questions that required participants to be reflective, analytic, and at times, evaluative. These questions explored teachers’ perceptions, thoughts, memories, reflections, and individual interpretations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) that instructed the researcher to situate themselves within the psychological and social world of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Audio recordings of the interviews were required for an IPA study, and verbatim transcripts were produced from them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Included in the data collection were the researcher’s analytic memos. Recorded reflective notes about what the researcher learned from the participants’ interviews, ideas about meanings derived from the data, and beliefs regarding the relationships about and between categories. This lent credibility and trustworthiness to the study (Groenewald, 2008). The analytic memos were useful for data analysis purposes in conceptualizing the raw data (Groenwald, 2008).

**Procedures**

**Beginning the Study**
Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study and the Superintendent and administrative cabinet for the cooperating school district also approved the study, the research process commenced. The researcher sought voluntary participants from the elementary buildings by sending out an informational letter, via email, introducing the study and seeking those interested and willing to discuss their perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students’ academic capabilities (See Appendix A). Upon obtaining names of those interested in participating in the study, the researcher used purposeful sampling to maintain homogeneity with the sample set to make sure the participants met the criteria for participation to create a homogeneous sample set. Again, the criteria for participation included being a White, female elementary teacher who taught in the district for at least three years with ages ranging between twenty-five to fifty-five years of age. The researcher made contact with three participants who met the criteria and asked them to identify meeting times and locations of their choosing to conduct the one-to-one, semi-structured interviews.

**Engaging in the Study**

When meeting for the first interview session, the researcher provided participants with a copy of the consent form (See Appendix B). Information on the consent form was reviewed with participants to ensure they understood the study’s scope, purpose, procedures, participation risks, time commitment, and finally, the participant’s rights. For willing teachers interested in participating in the study, having them summarize the consent document and having encouraged them to pose questions regarding the study helped the researcher to know they understood what was asked of them. The consent form was then signed, and the interview protocol was followed. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once all interviews were
completed and transcribed, they were stored in a password-protected computer accessible only by the researcher.

**Data Analysis**

The art of interpreting qualitative data required the researcher to devise an organized, detailed, and transparent account of the meaning of the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This can be seen as a complex task since IPA research does not have a single prescribed procedure. Smith and colleagues (2009) outlined a series of common processes which can be applied to analyzing data. The researcher transcribed interviews, reviewed each line multiple times, analyzed the claims, concerns, and understandings, then made notations in the margins on the computer (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). Columns were made on the transcript so that each level of analysis was mapped into a different column. Notations and comments based on the transcripts were either descriptive in discussing the content, linguistic, exploring the language usage by the participant, or at the more interpretative, conceptual level, focusing on conceptual coding (Smith et al., 2009).

This idiographic analysis process began with the particulars and over multiple reviews of the text, moved toward more abstract themes (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This iterative and inductive process continued through each transcript, then across all of the transcripts seeking relationships between themes (Smith et al., 2009). Through the process of reflective engagement with the transcripts, the researcher worked to make sense of the connections between themes and mapped out how some themes fit together. Once the superordinate concepts were determined, a final structure of themes was composed (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the researcher’s analysis, the researcher imposed peer validation to audit and review the coding and analysis
(Smith, 2010). To ensure the credibility of the research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using an external check of the process through peer debriefing where another researcher would review the compatibility between the participants’ views in the raw data and the researcher’s interpretation and representation of them. This process confirmed that the researcher demonstrated how the conclusions and interpretations were reached and that these were grounded in the data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). This peer validation became part of the audit trail which provided evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher.

**Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research**

**Ethical considerations**

Approval was obtained through the IRB at Northeastern University. Having successfully completed the National Institute of Health training course in protecting the rights of human research participants prior to conducting the study, the researcher submitted the certification to the Institutional Review Board. Written consent was obtained by all participants as well as consent from the cooperating school district’s superintendent and the administrative cabinet. Ethical responsibilities toward the participants was a primary concern (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This included monitoring their emotional state while participating in the interview, as well as guarding their anonymity and confidentiality. To maintain confidentiality, documents, audio recordings, and data were stored in a secure, password protected computer accessible only to the researcher. Identifiable markers were removed to protect the anonymity of participants and the cooperating district by assigning each a pseudonym.

**Credibility**
To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, Smith (2010) suggested a series of quality indicators that were followed. These included collecting appropriate data from participants and from the researcher’s analytic memos, with a focus on the particulars within each transcript, balanced with the data found across all of the data sets (Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). The analysis focused on how things were understood by the participant, grounded in participants’ accounts of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Considerable attention was paid to the analytic and reflexive components within the process (Smith, 2010). Peer validation from fellow researchers to audit and validate strategies was used to test for coherence and plausibility of the researcher’s analysis to attain trustworthiness (Smith et al., 2009). To establish transparency, the researcher balanced the use of verbatim extracts infused within the analysis and provided ample contextual detailing of participants, the research, and the overall study (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Oxley, 2016; Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2009).

**Transferability**

The IPA approach promoted an open, inductive, and detailed investigation with an idiographic focus to understand the meaning of unique or subjective phenomena (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Using etic and emic perspectives, immersion into the data provided an in-depth analysis of a small group of elementary teachers’ interpretations of their individual experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). These detailed descriptions from those individual accounts were shared out in the research using narratives to retain the voice of the participants, coupled with the researcher’s interpretative commentary (Smith et al., 2009).

This research will enable scholars and practitioners alike, to acquire a better understanding of how some educators interpret their experiences and understandings of the
formation of their perceptions of students within their personal contexts and how this relates to their educational decision making. While the findings were not universal in generalizing professional development and systematic changes for all schools, the findings point to further study recommendations, as well as the need for districts to consider examining individuals’ positionalities to recognize their assumptions, biases, and conceptions in relation to their perceptions of students and their academic decision making. By using a part-to-whole approach (Smith & Osborn, 2008), such as delving into individual teachers’ perceptions of students’ cognitive abilities, tailored and holistic support should be offered to teachers in working to overcome their biases and assumptions that cause roadblocks for subgroups of students in education, making the IPA methodology a suitable framework in seeking such understandings.

**Internal Audit**

In order to assure confirmability and trustworthiness in qualitative research, the researcher built in an intellectual research trail and a physical research audit trail (Carcary, 2009). A detailed account of the research process to document the events, influences, and actions of the researcher aided in ensuring a quality study (Koch, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). The researcher maintained a record of the different aspects of the study, should an external audit be solicited in the future. This entailed keeping records of the raw data, detailed notes, transcripts, coding thought processes, and a reflexive journal to expose the rationale of the decisions and choices made by the researcher throughout the study (Nowell et al., 2017). Confidentiality was maintained as this information was housed in a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher. Documentation of research decisions and activities were logged along with paperwork and audio recordings (Carcary, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (1985) detailed six categories of information to be collected, raw data, data reduction and analysis notes,
data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials related to intentions and dispositions, and preliminary development information. Preserving this trail aided the researcher in reflecting on the evolution of her thinking, identifying if the findings were grounded in the data, and whether inferences were sound (Carcary, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). The audit trail placed considerable emphasis on theoretical, methodological, reflective, evaluative, and analytical decisions made throughout the study and encouraged an added layer of transparency to the research (Carcary, 2009; Smith et al., 2009).

**Self-Reflexivity and Transparency**

Self-reflexivity was the active engagement of the conscious self in viewing one as both a researcher and a respondent and the process of recognizing the self within the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher positioned herself within the research and the positionality of the researcher was evident in the selection of the research topic and the way in which that topic was researched (Smith et al., 2009). Interrogation and disclosure of the researcher’s positionality provided transparency for readers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher critically examined her own positionality in regard to her biases, presumptions, and perceptions of normalization to be receptive of others’ positionalities. While seeking to understand others’ perspectives, it was important for the researcher to remember that there were limits to her interpretations based on personal biases and preconceived notions that generate new understandings (Gallagher, 1996). Self-examination of positionality in exploration of interpretations, problems in practice, pedagogical approaches, interventions, policies, and practices helped to reduce those biases that inform decision making, fostering greater equity and
equality through understandings. This positionality statement acknowledged the researcher’s personal positions that have the potential to influence or taint the research.

As an elementary teacher, the researcher vowed to treat all students with the utmost respect they deserved, as well as to provide venues for students to share their worlds and viewpoints in an open, safe, and supportive setting. The impact of the researcher’s father’s negative educational experiences has always compelled her to be drawn to students like him, those labeled as less worthy or less capable, as well as holding a deep commitment to issues of social justice. As an educator, the researcher wanted to hear students’ voices and discover their needs, to aid them in recognizing their assets and gifts and to help them to perceive themselves as successful students and people (Takacs, 2002). And yet, the researcher found many teachers who did not hold a similar mentality toward their students, many speaking ill of them and not always providing them the high quality, challenging learning experiences they deserved.

After over ten years of teaching experience, the researcher became a building level administrator in a small city school district. In this capacity, the researcher had the opportunity to go into classrooms in kindergarten through twelfth grade, working with many well-intentioned educators who openly exhibited distinct biases and oppressive practices regarding the education of Students of Color and poor students. The pervasive theme that some teachers and other administrators expressed was that “they” (the Students of Color, non-middle class students) were not able to learn as well as the White students because of their family structures and backgrounds because “they” just did not value education like “we” do. This theme was consistent with research regarding cultural capital and deficit thinking where underserved students and their families were blamed for their underachievement (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Jæger, 2011; Singleton & Hays, 2008; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004; Sleeter, 1992). As a result, many students were not engaged with
their learning and did not hold positive relationships with school personnel. Yet staff members were unwilling to acknowledge how their interactions, beliefs, and prejudices toward certain student groups may have contributed to the academic failures of those groups.

The challenge of remaining neutral is considerable. As Nganga (2011) suggested, once one identified what one was passionate about, it can lead to opportunities for inquiry and finding solutions for educational issues. It is precisely that passion that can cause the researcher to overlook observations and jump to premature conclusions (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Because of the researcher’s teaching and administrative experiences as well as her familial background, caution had to be exercised to avoid negatively representing other educators who may have been perceived as unjustly labeling students. The researcher may hold preconceived notions that many educators lack cultural competence in working with students who come from backgrounds different from their own. Beliefs are socially constructed based on individuals’ positionalities, and it is essential to strive to maintain the highest possible level of objectivity (Banks, 2007). Reflecting on the researcher’s identity, background, and experiences to identify and isolate personal biases, as well as to separate facts from feelings helped to neutralize those biases. In addition, because IPA is an iterative process, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest, to minimize sources of bias, it is important for the researcher to reflect on her interpretations of the interview data and the analysis, and continuously hold interactions between the researcher and the data to remain focused on the data.

Being careful to construct open-ended questions so that the participant was not led down a path to responding to a question that aligned with the researcher’s preexisting assumptions helped to neutralize bias (Creswell, 2012). The researcher strived to reflect and be objective as a scholar practitioner, through self-understanding, and by being open to others’ varying
experiences, beliefs and perspectives helped the researcher to understand how individual teachers’ conceptions of self and how the sociopolitical forces molded their perceptions of students from diverse backgrounds.

**Limitations**

Generalizability is a limitation of IPA studies due to the use of small sample sizes, a focus on understanding individual’s lived experiences, and by making connections between individual’s experiences (Oxley, 2016). The female participants enlisted in this study were purposefully selected; males,Persons of Color, or females from rural or urban districts could also have been included in the sample set, however, homogeneity was a priority and the focus was on the sample set of participants who experienced the phenomenon under study within a similar context and place and time. The idiographic nature of IPA studies provided individualized perspectives and contexts on this topic, and therefore the findings were interpreted within the context of the study. This allowed readers to understand these experiences in new ways and consider how these experiences may have contributed to the academic standing of certain subgroups of students. Finally, there was no guarantee that participants did not fall victim to response bias (Creswell, 2012). This means that participants’ responses may have been what they thought the researcher wanted to hear and may not have reflected their actual views. The researcher believes that building a trusting rapport with participants as well as helping them to understand the value of learning more about their individual experiences and beliefs helped to suppress response bias.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Approximately eighty percent of American educators are White females, many of whom have grown up in monocultural, suburban communities with very little interaction with students from cultures other than their own (Ford, 2010; Jester & Fickel, 2013). Nationwide student demographics have become more ethnically diverse; Students of Color now comprise approximately forty-five percent of the student population, and the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) projects that Students of Color will constitute the majority of the student population by 2032 (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Therefore, three White female participants were purposefully selected for this study as a representative sample of the majority of the teaching force in the United States. Richness and depth of information was sought from a closely defined, purposive sampling of individuals to yield an insightful analysis of perceptions and understandings from this group of elementary teachers (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

The goal of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to understand how a small group of White, female elementary school teachers viewed and perceived Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. The primary focus of this investigation was to explore teachers’ evolving assumptions of their students’ cultural capital, grounded in their interpretations of students’ social assets, conceptions of self, and the influence of sociopolitical forces, which have the potential to shape teachers’ perceptions of students. The secondary focus was to glean insight into how elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students informed their academic decision making. Information on participant teacher views was obtained via individual interviews to better understand their lived experiences. To answer the research questions guiding this study, a cultural capital theory lens was used to connect the theoretical framework and the analysis of the interview data. This research yielded valuable insight into the
impact of upbringing, family values, and educational experiences of these participating elementary teachers on their views of Students of Color and individuals coming from low income homes and their academic potential.

**Data and Demographics**

The participating district was public and suburban, that had ethnically, culturally, and a socioeconomically diverse student population. For the purpose of this study, the school district was called Karisville Central School District (KCSD). This Upstate New York district educated approximately 2,940 elementary students from kindergarten through sixth grade (New York State Education Department, 2019). Sixty-one percent of the elementary student population in the KCSD were White students and thirty-nine percent were Students of Color from various ethnic backgrounds (New York State Education Department, 2019). Forty-three percent of the elementary students within this district were considered to be economically disadvantaged (New York State Education Department, 2019). KCSD demographic information is represented in Table 1 to illustrate the elementary student demographics within the school district (New York State Education Department, 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>KCSD Elementary Student Demographics in the 2018-19 School Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Demographic Descriptor Categories</strong></td>
<td><strong>KCSD Elementary Student Descriptors</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Student Gender | 51% Male  
49% Female |
| Student Ethnicity | 11% Black of African American  
7% Hispanic or Latinx  
13% Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander  
61% White  
7% Multiracial |
| Student Ages | 5 to 12 years old (K-6) |
| Socioeconomic Status of Students | 43% Economically Disadvantaged |
| Type of School Setting | Suburban Setting |
In total, there were three White, middle class female elementary teacher participants from two buildings within KCSD. Each participant was interviewed three times using a semi-structured format. Each session held a different focus to explore teachers’ experiences and to determine how meaning was attributed to those experiences. The first session focused on investigation of participant backgrounds, including family life and school experiences. Connections were drawn between participants’ belief systems and the norms and values held by each participant’s school and district during their second interviews. Finally, the third interview focused on connecting participants’ belief systems with outside influences on their appraisals of student potential and performance, and on academic decisions made by participants for their students. To protect the identities of the participants and to maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each individual participant, as well as to each school and the district itself.

Participant profiles, including demographic descriptors, are outlined in Table 2. Demographic descriptor information was compiled through submission of the Research Study Interest Information Sheet by each participant prior to each individual’s interviews (See Appendix C). Additional information is presented in regard to participants’ childhood profiles. This information was amassed through participant interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Participant Profiles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptors</strong></td>
<td>Alexa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Years Teaching</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Teaching</td>
<td>First/Second Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A special area teacher is an elementary educator instructing art, music, or physical education classes*
Participant Profiles

At thirty-one years old, *Alexa* was the youngest participant with the least teaching experience in this study. She has taught first and second grade students for the past nine years in the KCSD. Alexa grew up in a two-parent, upper middle class, Christian household with a stay-at-home mother and a working father. Both parents had a college education and wanted their children to have positive educational experiences in a suburban community setting. Alexa participated in advanced placement coursework beginning in elementary school, eventually taking every advanced placement course offered by her district. Alexa reported that her school experience was very positive and challenging, and she was the valedictorian of her class. While her suburban school district was somewhat diverse, Alexa recalled that the majority of her classmates in the advanced placement track were White, middle and upper class students. Her family emphasized the importance of pursuing their passions, having sacred family time, and the importance of holding the Christian faith and morals in their lives. Alexa’s family values and the perceived family values and expectations held by some of the parents of her students, at times, made it professionally challenging to work with them.

Forty-six-year old *Julie* has taught kindergarten for the past twenty years in KCSD. She was raised in a two-parent household that valued their Catholic faith, respect for others, and education. She attended school in a rural, predominantly White district (there was one African American student in her school) outside a large city in western New York. While Julie was not the valedictorian of her class, she categorized her education as a positive experience, having participated in all advanced placement coursework offered by her district and participated in accelerated math courses beginning in middle school. Unlike Alexa, she did not encounter a
more diverse group of students until her teaching experience as a Head Start educator on a Native American reservation.

_Fran_, a fifty-one-year old White, middle class female, has taught elementary special area education in KCSD for twenty-three years. Raised in a two-parent Catholic household with five siblings in Western New York, her parents valued education, family time, and supporting each other. As an elementary and middle school student, Fran attended a large suburban school with mostly White students in attendance, then moved to a small rural school district for her high school years. She described the district she attended in high school as “all White” with one African American student in attendance. Fran began receiving enhancement and accelerated education beginning in elementary school. The advanced educational program helped Fran gain progressive intellectual confidence, and she became valedictorian of her class. Her current students are far more diverse than those she attended school with. She has found KCSD’s diversity “professionally challenging” with students raised with vastly dissimilar perspectives and backgrounds.

**Analyzing the Data**

In IPA studies, Smith et al. (2009) explained that there are no single prescribed methods of conducting an analysis; rather, one must exercise flexible analytic development and structure focused on the participants’ attempts to make sense of their experiences and those of the researcher’s reflective engagement with the participant’s accounts. IPA analysis is idiographic in nature, focusing on individual participant experiences and what they mean to those who experienced them (Shaw, 2019). This research analysis was considered subjective, framed within a social and cultural context in which the analyst’s understanding of participants’ experiences were from the perspective and lens of the person who experienced it, within a particular place.
and time (Shaw, 2019). The participants were asked personal questions regarding their families, values, friend groups, student educational experiences, and how they thought about different subgroups of students. The participants quickly opened up to the researcher, and narrated their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, albeit with some caution to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality.

This analysis was a product of double hermeneutics, which included the participants’ narratives of their lived experiences and the researcher’s account and her interpretations of the participants’ meanings of their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Shaw, 2019; Smith et al., 2009). This analysis was iterative. The researcher used a systematic, repetitive, and recursive process, using fluid descriptions and engagement with the transcript, moving from the individual interviews, then to analysis of the whole set of narratives, and finally across all three participants’ accounts (Smith et al., 2009). Each interview was isolated, moving from the particular to the shared, from the descriptive to the interpretative, which aided the researcher in understanding each participant’s individual perspective along with those of the collective group.

The researcher began by transcribing each interview, listening to each recording multiple times, rereading and reviewing every line. The interpretative relationship began with each transcript as the researcher held sustained engagement with the text and process of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The challenge was to bracket off ideas that emerged from case to case to maintain the idiographic focus on each case. To support this idiographic engagement, a three-column table was created for each transcribed interview to allow for multiple levels of analysis. In accordance with Smith and colleagues (2009), the researcher’s analysis focused on writing notations and comments regarding the descriptive content of the participants’ narratives, linguistic content, exploring the language used by the participants, or notations on the more
interpretative level, focusing specifically on the conceptual aspects of each of the participant’s narratives. Following an idiographic approach, each interview was scrutinized. Subsequent interviews were examined on a case by case basis. The researcher then moved toward general categorizations (Shaw, 2019; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Notations were sorted to identify themes for each participant and case comparisons were made. Through this immersion with the data, careful consideration, and systematic interpretation, common participant themes were identified and were categorized.

**Themes**

To better understand how three White, female elementary educators perceived Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students, the researcher explored each individual’s lived experiences, which yielded common patterns across the interview data. Three superordinate themes were identified, representative of the central concepts found in each participant’s account. All participants shared aspects of the three superordinate themes in idiosyncratic ways. Each superordinate theme outlined two to three corresponding subthemes. All themes contributed to answering the research question, “How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?” as well as informing how elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students informed their academic decision making. The ultimate goal was to learn from the lived experiences of the participants to identify the root of subgroup student perceptions. Figure 1 outlines the superordinate and subthemes identified during data analysis.
Figure 1. Superordinate Themes and Subthemes. This figure illustrates the three superordinate themes and the eight subthemes.

That’s How I Was Brought Up

A key foundational aspect of each participant’s reflections on perceptual development of others was the importance of their family values, nurture, and education. All three participants grew up in supportive, two-parent households in which the mother was particularly active in supporting her child’s journey from adolescence to adulthood. The mother figures of all participants were highly regarded influencers in their development of sense of self, as well as on interactions with participants and their current students. Dedicated family time, hard work, and academic success were noted by all participants as critical family values. Most notably, participants described their faith as influential, particularly in shaping their behavior and demonstration of respect to peers and adults.
**Alexa’s Family.** Her family reflections were positive, and she reported feeling “very fortunate to have grown up in a wonderful family. My parents aren’t perfect, but pretty darned close.” Alexa was grateful for her parents’ establishment of Christian-centered values and beliefs. “My parents’ faith and church were a huge part of our growing up, and kind of our training as kids.” She and her siblings were expected to do their best in school, follow their passions, and put family first. Their faith-based framework shaped “the way we were taught to treat other people and work to the best of our ability … we were taught to see where these ideas came from.”

She credited her parents’ example for her own model of student support in her classroom noting, “How I interact with kids when they’re struggling, the fact that I can see when [my students are] struggling and I’m here to help you, but you’ve got to meet me halfway too. I’m not going to do it all for you.” Alexa viewed her family’s faith and support as critical components in her development into becoming a good person and a successful student.

**Alexa’s Friends.** Alexa’s two friend groups—one at school, one at church—presented important personal development opportunities for her. She was able to explore those relationships through each group’s unique attributes and beliefs. Both of her friend groups consisted of White middle and upper class females. She said, “I had friends of a different skin color, some of my — most of my friends were different White girls. I don’t look back and say I chose because of that, but they ended up being my really good friends.” People of Color were periphery friends in Alexa’s groups. Her school group consisted of hard-working, conscientious, highly intelligent, mainly White students who took advanced placement courses with her. Alexa’s church youth group bonded and befriended each other through shared religious beliefs and dedication to giving back to those less fortunate. Alexa recalled that her youth group “went
on mission trips … over the summers. That was really influential, spending that much time

together.” One mission of the church was to bring different ethnicities and cultures into it. She

recalled that they didn’t “want us just to be White people hanging out together.” Alexa

understood that a diverse community enriched personal growth and development. The values

shared with her church friends (more so than her school group) fostered a lasting bond of

friendship that Alexa prizes to this day.

**Alexa’s childhood: School and neighborhood.** Educational experiences and where she

lived growing up contributed to Alexa’s beliefs regarding other subgroup populations. Alexa

attended a suburban school district in upstate New York. The district had students from different

backgrounds and ethnicities, but still held a majority White student and faculty population. This

school district had students coming from two communities, one community was closer to the

city, Marcy, and the other, Carrington, was more suburban with upper and middle class families

residing there. Alexa shared the culture/class divide between residents of the towns of Marcy and

Carrington. Laughing, she said, “Cherry [Central School District] could get a bad rap and I never

felt that way, but there was also a sense of well, I live in Carrington, not Marcy. Oh, there was a

divide. And [it was] probably a little bit hoiti toiti.” She explained, “You don’t want to go to the

Marcy Walmart at ten o’clock at night, you know, or things like that. [There was] the thought

that there’d be more inner city kids or people coming to that [Walmart] because it’s close.”

Alexa and her parents believed that the downtown area wasn’t safe, and the “urbanesque”

community was undesirable. Alexa, too, believed that suburban, relatively well-to-do Carrington

was superior to Marcy, its city-like counterpart in the Cherry CSD. Cherry CSD provided Alexa

with the challenges of an enriched curriculum. “I think it [the school district] would have

qualified as a suburban district, though it’s definitely — especially the Marcy side — it was
pretty close to the city, more urbanesque. I knew as a student that Cherry [Central School District] sometimes got a bad rap.” Because a portion of the school district was comprised of a city-like demographic, Alexa believed that Cherry was seen less favorably than the majority of suburban districts in the area.

**Intellectual challenges at school.** Alexa appreciated the intellectual challenges that accompanied the enrichment experiences and opportunities her parents fought for and found tracking to be a positive experience. In her opinion, Alexa was more stimulated and less bored in the enrichment group than she would have been with those less capable or motivated than herself. Her “track” was comprised mainly of upper middle class, intrinsically motivated White students. She did not consider race a factor in student track placement. “In middle school, my school had—if you started on a certain track you could move faster through curriculum—so, I know I did ninth grade math and ninth grade science in middle school. That allowed me—that gave me time to do additional [courses] like calculus and physics, stuff that I wouldn’t have had time for if I had been on a regular schedule. So, I definitely felt like by high school, it [the track] was based on which classes you were in. And, I don’t remember having perceptions based on race or culture. There were kids of multiple races and cultures in my classes. There [were] probably more White than other people, but I don’t feel that was a deciding factor at all.”

**Julie’s family: Christianity and high expectations.** As devout Catholics, Julie’s family valued God, hard work, achievement, kindness, and giving back to the community. She credits her mother, who recognized the importance of patience and developing the attributes of a “decent human being,” as a role model of mothering and teaching.

High parental expectations, both scholastically and socially, for Julie and her sisters was a cornerstone of their upbringing. Julie’s family values have had a lasting personal and
professional impact, believing that “They definitely weave into what I focus on with my students on a daily basis. Especially since it’s kindergarten and — it’s their first formal school experience. So, we talk a lot about treating others, how you want to be treated. Thinking about others who are less fortunate than we are. How do you treat each other in a classroom setting? I think my level of, when I was a kid, what I was pushed and expected to achieve, I feel like I do put that on my students. That they, no matter who they are, they are expected to do the work in here. My expectations are that they will do their best in here every day, whatever that means for them.”

Julie’s family values informed how she regulated behaviors in her classroom and impacted her expectations for student interaction. Julie treated classroom children like her own. Therefore, she placed the same expectations upon her students that her parents placed upon her. She continued, “I have certain expectations for [my students’] behavior that I have for my own children and how they treat and speak to each other—how they treat and speak to me, and some of them need more help with that than others.”

**Intentional limiting of diversity: Shared values.** Julie’s school population was predominantly White. Recalling her childhood peer group, she listed athletes, theater and musically-inclined kids, and well-rounded, good students as friends. Julie believed that they “gravitated towards each other” because of shared family values, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. She explained, “I think it was more values for them [referring to her friends], more what their parents held them to. I think it was also students in similar academic places too. Because I was in higher level classes, like AP classes, and those people were my friends because we were all taking those classes together.” Reflecting now on her core childhood friend group and those she still considers to be friends today, Julie realized that they are all White. She attributed this to a lack of diversity in her community. “I think back to a lot of the
friend groups from high school that I had, that I’m still friends with, it’s all Caucasian. There was one ‘token’ African American boy who was kind of—he wasn’t a close friend, but he was definitely in our friend group.” Julie used the word *token* to describe the African American friend in their group, as a “symbolic effort of acceptance” of a Student of Color in a predominantly White, rural, western New York community. Julie reported that her parents did not permit friendships with people of different backgrounds, those who did not have the same perceived values and work ethic. She recalled, “Students with other backgrounds [socioeconomic status] that might have been sketchy. I was not allowed to be with them and hang out with them because if they were a bad influence, it was not acceptable.”

Julie didn’t encounter racial or ethnic diversity until she began her teaching career. She did, however, recall an awareness of poverty in her community, but reported that she didn’t differentiate between poor students and middle and upper class students until she became a teenager. It was at that time—middle school—that students were placed in groups (tracked).

Julie’s accelerated learning track was comprised of students from backgrounds similar to hers, further limiting interactions with diverse student groups. She stated, “It was a class of 163 people that I graduated with. Mostly White. We didn’t have—there was literally one African American family.” Julie laughed as she noted, “It’s so funny, I didn’t really have any diverse groups of students growing up. So, I didn’t really encounter diversity until I started teaching.” Julie had minimal experiences with different races growing up and limited interactions with socioeconomically disadvantaged students. As a participant in accelerated learning experiences and advanced placement courses, she noted, “My classes were all White students with middle to upper class families. Some of them were fairly wealthy.” Julie now feels that her lack of exposure to diverse people limited her perspective and world view. She explained, “You know,
we talk about how we’re all students and we’re all humans on this planet, but we’re also different and that’s so great. That’s what makes it great! I don’t think I got that as a kid.” Not only did her parents restrict her interactions with other students with dissimilar backgrounds, but her educational experiences did as well. Being placed in an accelerated learning track also constrained her interplay with different student groups.

**Fran’s family values.** Fran grew up in a large Catholic family in which she was the sixth and youngest child. Her father was an engineer and her mother worked in her school district. A working mother was unusual at that time. “It seemed to me like most other mothers stayed at home.” The family had dinner together each night and each child’s “job” was to work hard in school and to go to college. Music was important to her parents, and therefore, all six children took lessons. Respect and responsibility were valued traits, and Fran’s childhood values were the foundation of her classroom beliefs. She said, “I expect my kids to be responsible for themselves. They don’t always have to match my level of expectation, but I want my students to be responsible for their learning, as well. So, I try to hold [my students] to expectations I would hold my children to. Although, I’m probably harder on my own kids than I am with my students.” Fran’s family values were visible in her classroom by treating her students with the same rules and expectations she held for her own children.

**Friendship, integration, and racism.** Friendships were a valuable influence on Fran’s growth and development. Because she changed school districts after middle school, she developed two different friend groups. She recalled that her elementary and middle school friends in her predominantly White suburban district were “like me, pretty much, as far as education being valued in the home and pursuing a love of reading, getting good grades, being motivated in school, being motivated to go to college.” Her friends’ family traits and values were
also similar to hers. “Parents, for the most part, were educated or hard working, focused on student achievement in some way, churchgoing people.”

Fran was unique within this research study in that her elementary school best friend, Cheryl, was not White. Cheryl was an African American girl who came from a highly-educated, middle class family in which both parents were college graduates. Having an African American best friend heavily influenced Fran’s perceptions of Persons of Color, and the hatred hurled at Cheryl from one White family affected her as well. “Cheryl and I would walk around our neighborhood and they would scream racial slurs to her, like, ‘N-word, go home!’ Cheryl and I still talk about it today. Both of us were scarred by that for different reasons.”

**Segregation and tracking.** All of Fran’s elementary school friends were in advanced reading and math groups, except for Cheryl. Fran believed that this was because Cheryl’s “grades went down a little bit” after her parents divorced. Although Cheryl’s parents held institutional capital, she was not in the highest track in school. Fran recalled that her group of six or seven friends spent a lot of time together inside of and outside of school. In middle school, however, her friend group changed. There were two middle schools in the district, and all of Fran’s friends—except Cheryl—went to the other middle school. Fran said, “That was really weird for me because I had this strong group of people who really loved education and then I got to Center School [her middle school], and I felt like a complete dork and an idiot because I really only had Cheryl because all of my other friends [went to another school]. And then Cheryl found a whole new group of friends who were racially similar to her. And that was weird, too, because we had never really been separated by race like that before.” Fran expressed sadness that she no longer had the security of having a friend base with similar traits and values. Most importantly, she recognized that she and Cheryl formed new friend groups with racially similar individuals.
This could have been an opportunity for Fran to have joined Cheryl’s new friend group had she sought to befriend other African American students, but she did not.

Finding a new friend group was challenging at Center School. Fran wanted to befriend others who were placed in the higher track with her, however, other students who wanted to befriend her were not in the highest track in her new middle school. “I was in this group [a new group of classmates], but I didn’t know anybody in that group. I didn’t have any friends in that group. In other classes, the people who were nice to me weren’t people in that group. So, I was in junior high school sort of like, you’re not the kind of kid I used to hang out with, but you’re the kid who’s being nice to me now so— weird, it was weird.” Fran had always had the comfort of knowing the individuals in her advanced track in elementary school and this move to a new middle school changed her motivation for befriending others. In moving to another district in high school, Fran decided she did not want to experience those feelings of isolation and not fitting in again.

When Fran moved to a more rural community and school district for her high school years, her friend group was different. She felt that the people in the Smallsville (her new town and school district) community were “church-going people” but it was a “culture shock” for her because not everyone’s parents were educated, and she did not have as much in common with her new friend group. A purposeful choice was made to not befriend other high school students who shared her passion for learning and for music and held similar family values because Fran longed for popularity, so “When I went to Smallsville, I thought, I’m never going to be the odd person out again. If I have to be like, not that smart, or if I have to… you know, what I mean? If people don’t have to think that I’m smart, that’s fine with me because I want to have boyfriends. I want to go out. I want to be popular. I want people to think I’m awesome.”
Fran regretted the friend group she chose in Smallsville, stating, “I made a choice to leave Jamie [a friend she made when she first moved to Smallsville] and join the popular group. She would have been a better friend to me. Her parents were both educated. Her father was a pastor. Her mother was a music teacher. They were interested in music. They were very interested in education. She would have been a much better match for me, friendship-wise, and she was a super nice person, but I wasn’t smart enough to see that when I was fourteen. So, I ditched her for other people who were more popular and maybe didn’t share as many values with them. But I perceived that’s where I wanted to be.” Fran’s belief that those with similar backgrounds and values as her own equated to comfort and safety. Because Fran diverged from those who were most similar to her, she found her friendships in high school to be superficial and fleeting.

Fran reported that her educational experiences were extremely positive and plentiful. Both school districts she attended had an overwhelming number of White, middle and upper class students. She considered her early placement in a highly advanced track to be meaningful, allowing her to move quickly through her learning. She said, “The unpopular topic [tracking] in education today was a very positive experience. I had that whole group of friends that traveled together from year to year and we felt very smart and we felt validated in our being smart. So, for me, it was positive, and I got to learn at my own speed.” Fran likened this select group of advanced students to a special group or club. The only diversity in her advanced track was a small group of students from India whose parents were engineers at a large, well-known company. “My group always used grade levels ahead books. In math, we were ahead of the other groups. I don’t think we lorded it, at least I don’t recall that we lorded it over anybody. I don’t remember saying, ‘Oh, you’re stupid.’ I just remember it being our own little—our own little
thing.” Fran seemed to relish in being part of this exclusive group, although it prevented her from interacting with students from other racial groups and social classes.

Moving from a suburban, achievement-driven district to a rural one, Fran found fewer opportunities for enrichment and acceleration. There was a Regents track and a non-regents track (also called a school track) at Smallsville, and Fran recalled that the non-Regents track was comprised of students from primarily lower socioeconomic demographics. She recalled, “I would say the kids who went into the school track were the kids who had no hope. Or kids whose parents just didn’t care, and I think Smallsville was pretty vanilla [referring to race] so, it was, generally speaking, based socioeconomically.” Fran’s reference to students from low income homes as those with “no hope” underscored her belief that poor students had little chance for advancing their social and economic status as they became adults.

**Conclusions.** While these participants had similar backgrounds and experiences in school, there were some differences between participants’ perceptions of others who were not White or middle class. All three expressed that they did not select their friends based on their race, ethnicity, or social class standing, yet only one had a close friend who was of a different race other than White.

Fran’s experiences with her African American friend, Cheryl, gravely impacted her in a number of ways. Because she experienced racism alongside her friend, albeit in a different way than Cheryl, she was more reflective and concerned about how she thought about and interacted with Persons of Color. She was surprised and hurt when Cheryl sought racially similar friends in middle school and did not befriend other African American students in middle or high school.

All participants openly shared their views regarding poor students when they were growing up; identifying them as hopeless and undesirable to befriend. Alexa attempted to portray
that she valued all individuals as her equal and worthy of acceptance and friendship, as her Christian faith taught. Her true feelings regarding those from the city demonstrated that she too found them as undesirable and explained how going to Marcy was unsafe because there were too many people from the city there. The implication being that the city folk were of a different class, but ethnicity or socioeconomic status was never specifically cited for the differences in class. Alexa seemed to relish in the thought that her family lived in Carrington, calling it “a bit hoiti toiti.” This deficit mindset towards individuals from the city demonstrated an elitist tendency towards people from a higher socioeconomic status and potentially White persons as well.

Tracking was a central theme throughout all of the participants’ narratives. All explaining how they personally enjoyed and benefitted from being placed in the highest tracks in school. Julie was the only participant who recognized and acknowledged that her lack of interaction with others from different social classes and races sheltered her from a more well-rounded and broader worldview. Alexa and Fran took great pride in being in the highest tracks as it permitted them to continue to grow intellectually, with a faster and more rich experience, leading to becoming the valedictorians of their classes. There was no recognition or acknowledgement that their educational experiences were inequitable, as compared to their peers placed in the middle and lower tracks. Being placed in the highest tracks isolated them and allowed them to perceive themselves as having superior intellect, ability, and skills, maintaining their higher status within the school.

The Force of Forces

As the participants shared their stories and experiences during the interviews, it became apparent that there were outside influences that significantly impacted participants’ perceptions
of Students of Color and poor students. The force of those outside influences, or forces, were powerful in shaping individual’s beliefs. It was evident throughout the interviews that each participant was influenced by familial, societal, school, and district influences that guided and shaped participants’ perceptions of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged student subgroups. All three participants were heavily influenced by those whose cultural capital held the greatest societal value. In some instances, it was difficult to pinpoint the exact outside forces responsible for influencing their development, judgments, and viewpoints on Students of Color and lower class students. District and building priorities, as well as professional development reinforced and helped shape teachers’ perceptions of their Students of Color and poor students.

Karisville Central School District’s identified priorities were the focus of professional development, throughout the district and within the buildings. A core focus emphasized academic success and achievement within the district, which prompted other initiatives highlighted by the participants as an underlying source of tension and conflict for teachers in educating and supporting their students’ growth and development. In addition, Alexa, Julie, and Fran each reported that Karisville valued its Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) initiative which focused on standardizing behavioral expectations for all students across the district and the other focus was on working with students living in poverty. KCSD also emphasized that all students were capable of high academic achievement. Both the district and individual buildings provided continuous professional development to teach, influence, and reinforce ideas and thought processes about students and families. There was recognition of the need to unify practices and behaviors used by staff members.
Alexa’s church and family as influencers. All the respondents cited family as their primary developmental influences, particularly in the high value placed upon hard work and academic achievement. Alexa additionally shared that her church and faith reinforced her family’s values, with an emphasis on kindness and treating others well. Alexa’s search for those faith and family-based qualities in others occasionally led her peers at KCSD to judge her differently. At times, her beliefs clashed with those held by the KCSD. Alexa recalled, “Working hard, the focusing on growth was definitely part of my family values. Certainly too, was being respectful, behavior choices were a huge part of my family values, [and] that is a big push for us [KCSD district]. I really like a lot about PBIS. My one struggle with it is that we are so focused on the positive side that I wonder, well, what happens when they’re continuously breaking the rules? I’m a firm believer in natural consequences. And, um, a behavior management system doesn’t work without them if all you’re doing is losing a reward.”

Alexa’s expectations for student behavior and interactions with others was a reflection of her family and faith-based upbringing. She had a “zero tolerance for disrespect” policy, while maintaining opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation. Alexa explained, “I do sometimes wish there was a little more like, ‘Oh no, this is completely unacceptable [from the school district].’ My parents had zero tolerance for disrespect. That’s something that I’ve transferred. I really hope that my students see that, even for my kids that struggle. Part of my biggest concern with lack of consequences is that I don’t want it to appear that it’s ok that this kid was nasty to you in my class. That’s not ok. Zero tolerance for disrespect— but also that we can work with … poor choice[s], we can fix [them]. We can work on that relationship and we can get back to a good place. I think my parents’ discipline was always focused on that. Yes, you did a wrong choice and we need to address that, but then we’re going to work on, the words my parents
focused on was forgiveness, and how do we say sorry and how do we move on? I find that I use my faith and what I believe about that with my children, with discipline—that’s where it comes in—the way I think about reconciliation of relationships.” Outside forces, such as Alexa’s religion and family have influenced not only her expectations for students, but also how she viewed appropriate discipline in the school and classroom.

Societal influences and racism. When talking specifically about societal influences, Alexa said, “I think I would be naïve to say that it doesn’t influence me at all.” Alexa felt that society portrayed specific traits of what a successful student looked like; one who is hard working, passionate about learning, and had a supportive family involved in their children’s education. She felt strongly that a child would not be “excluded from being successful” if they didn’t have home support, as long as they were resilient individuals. She believed that she gave all of her students’ opportunities as long as they possessed those traits. Alexa noted that there had been racial tensions within the school from African American families who had been concerned that their children had not been given the same opportunities as White students. Alexa firmly believed that racial tensions may infiltrate schooling experiences for students because African Americans, as a group, felt there was racism when it did not actually exist. She did not believe that educators made choices based on race, nor did they play a role in possible racial tensions in school: “I do sometimes struggle with that; I sometimes feel that African Americans are, that group in particular, feel that it is racism when it’s not always there. That being said, I’m also fully aware that I come from a middle, upper middle class White family. There are things that I take for granted, that I’m unaware of in society, that I don’t even know.” She continued, “I work hard at trying to keep an open mind in that. One of the reasons I love teaching the little kids is that I don’t find those racial tensions as big of a part of my day-to-day life as a teacher. I’m
kind of grateful, I don’t know how well I’d handle it. I’m very thankful, like, when we talk about Martin Luther King, the kids talk about, well, why couldn’t the Black kids go to school? They don’t understand it. I’m very grateful that I don’t feel like those racial tensions are a part of my day-to-day.” Because her students are in first or second grade, she did not believe that they understood racial inequality or that it was a factor in schooling experiences unless an African American parent or student “wrongfully” claimed it to be so. Because Alexa believed there was no ill intention, on the part of the teachers, toward African American students, the actions of the teachers could not be considered to be racist. Unfortunately, inadvertent actions and wrongful exclusion from experiences due to implicit biases because of a student’s race is considered racism.

School and district influences. Alexa felt that the KCSD had not held many, if any, school-based conversations regarding Students of Color in education. Instead, the focus was primarily on working with students living in poverty. Alexa felt that race or ethnicity was not a determining factor in students’ academic success or their educational opportunities in school. She did not feel that a student’s race or ethnicity had any bearing on their academic achievement, nor would having conversations about race or ethnicity when reviewing student data be beneficial, constructive, or supported by the school. “One thing I really do appreciate is I don’t think we ever, certainly not in the data spreadsheets, or the way we talk, well, we wouldn’t be like, well, this kid is a minority kid, so we have to talk about him in a different way. That’s not part of discussions. I’m really grateful or I’d be really mad.” Having discussions about race or ethnicity would not be supported. “I have never felt like that was part of our determination factor [race or ethnicity was not part of the academic decision making] though. I have never felt that way. And, in fact, if it ever got implied that [if race or ethnicity was used in academic decision
making], we’d be in deep trouble.” She continued, “Where I think any thoughts like that would be shut down very quickly and would be discussed as not helpful to our mindset as a school.”

When asked about school and district-based conceptions of Students of Color and poor learners, Alexa felt that race and ethnicity had not been discussed at the building level, but she thought it might be disaggregated by race at the district level. “But it’s not part of—ok, for example, every time we give that computer-based test. We sit down, and we look at the data. And we don’t split it up and look at minority students. We’re looking at kids, what level they scored at.” While that may be true, the school and district are looking at the final outcome on a test as a measure of students’ learning, what was not considered by Alexa was the teaching which led up to the assessment and the academic decisions made by educators which contributed to how students performed on those assessments.

When looking at student data, socioeconomic status was discussed. As a matter of fact, a great deal of professional development on working with poor students and their families had been a focus within Alexa’s building. “We, poor student learners, poor students, again, when I feel like we have discussions about them it’s more like, ok, this is what the research shows can be a block or can be helpful, are we aware of that? Are we doing it?” The KCSD and its buildings have discussed shifts in the students’ socioeconomic demographic and voiced concerns regarding learning for poor students within the district. Alexa shared, “We’ve been told that Karisville is now up to 40%, as a district, of kids who are at or below the poverty line. And so, we’ve done some work as a staff, reading some books about the impact of poverty on kids’ brain development and, therefore, it impacts school learning. It’s something that we, as a staff, have done a lot on, no matter what. So, that’s become a bigger importance and making sure that we, as a staff, are aware and equipped to help kids. I think that is becoming a more important value for
the district.” Research had been collected and shared out among the staff and referred to regarding working with students from low income homes, but nothing, to Alexa’s knowledge, had been shared about working with Students of Color who comprised thirty-nine percent of the student demographic (New York State Education Department, 2019).

**Julie: Family as an influencer.** One prominent force identified as being significant in forming Julie’s perceptions was her family’s influence. Woven into her beliefs regarding students’ capabilities and expectations for her students had been the expectations placed upon her by her parents and the qualities valued by Julie’s family. She disclosed, “I think they definitely weave into what I focus on with my students on a daily basis. I think my level of, when I was a kid, what I was pushed and expected to achieve, I feel like I do put that on my students.” Julie’s perspective as to how students should work in school and how they should speak to her and to others was dependent on what her parents established as acceptable and appropriate behaviors in her household.

**Societal stereotypes.** Julie conveyed that she did not believe that societal stereotypes infiltrated her thinking regarding Students of Color and poor students. She said, “I don’t really have preconceived notions of them. I just don’t do it. I just don’t know—I don’t feel like that comes into play.” In response to whether or not she felt influenced by societal portrayals of groups of individuals, Julie stated, “Not really their abilities. I know they’re out there and I know societal stuff is out there. I think I don’t—I’m a bit sheltered where I am. I don’t, I don’t look at an African American student and say they’re not going to achieve. We don’t look at each other for our skin, we look at each other for how kind we are to other people. Are we treating each other respectfully and that’s the culture I try to cultivate in my classroom. Everyone has a voice. Everyone has a chance. Everyone is expected to do their best and to have a learning environment
that lets them learn.” Other responses, however, demonstrated the perpetuation of stereotypes in how she thought about different subgroups of students.

**Social assets as influencers.** Julie reflected on making judgements about students’ academic competence based on her first interactions with her students and thought about different subgroups of students she encountered growing up. “Just those first couple of days of school are very telling.” She measured the potential of students based on character traits and social assets that were valued by her family and what she values today. Julie explained that her initial judgements regarding student competence have been correct, particularly for middle class students and poor students. “It’s usually right; ninety-five percent of the time I’m right. But it doesn’t—to me, there’s not a race part there. Just the poor part, but sometimes the race part comes in to play with an ESL [English as a Second Language] kid just because of the language barrier, and a language with someone at home, it’s a barrier.” Julie believed that her initial judgements regarding students’ aptitudes were accurate based on students’ socioeconomic status and race could come into play if the student was a non-English speaker.

**School and district forces.** Much of the professional development at the building level focused on the changes made at the state and national levels to address the updated grade level standards. To provide overarching ideas for the district’s behavior management system, the PBIS program had been “the district’s big push and the building’s big push.” In addition, like Alexa stated, Julie communicated that her building focused on working with poor students since the poverty level within the district and building shifted over the past ten years. “I think our free and reduced lunch went from 10% to 40% in a small period of time.” She also noted that the district was highly focused on academic achievement for all students. She said, “There is definitely a push towards achievement and achieving at high levels for everyone.” Therefore, according to
Julie, engaging students from poor backgrounds had become a building and district priority. Julie had been heavily influenced by her training and how she thought about poor students. She took the traits and qualities she learned about in her poverty training and attempted to see which students “fit the bill.” Her training taught her that students living in poverty often came from crisis and did not come from “normal two parent homes.” Julie said, “I think, you know, you definitely try to see who fits those bills. Which kids, you know, may have some of those qualities, especially the ones from poverty. Do they have the characteristics that you hear about from our PD?”

**Fran’s family as a force.** Fran perceived successful students to be individuals who worked hard, asked questions, were curious, knew how to behave, had self-control, and were school ready. Those qualities were based on the value her family placed on those behaviors. In this excerpt, Fran reflected, “I think my own family values were that you have to do it yourself, stand up for yourself, take care of yourself; school is always right; do what the school says, type thing.” She earnestly stated that students’ family support was a strong factor in her perception of who had the potential to be successful in school. She said, “They have to know that it’s possible. So, my parents always made it be that school was possible and that it’s on you, too; my parents made it clear that I was going to be the one to do the work; they weren’t going to do it for me.”

**Outside forces and biases.** In considering whether or not societal portrayals of different subgroups of individuals influenced how she thought about her students, Fran felt society had no impact on her perceptions. She said, “I don’t think it does for me. I like to think I’m a champion of things. So, you know, I’ve heard people say, well, you know, I understand that, but then I see these big TVs going into certain houses and I don’t really understand how that’s working. And I, you know, I’ve had conversations with staff members and I say, well, of course, just because
you’re poor doesn’t mean you don’t want to be entertained, and if that’s the only entertainment you’re going to get all year, ever, you’re never going to a concert, you’re never going to an amusement park, you’re never going, you know—where ever—that TV is it!” Fran explained that she felt that those with a middle class perspective might have a difficult time understanding the decisions made by families who are socioeconomically constrained. “As a middle class parent, we see that as: that’s what you do, you save your money, you get this, you go work hard, and I think it’s hard for some people, for teachers, to look at their students and to understand.

How can you be getting a free lunch, but you have brand new Nikes on? That’s hard for some people.” While Fran stated that she didn’t believe societal portrayals impacted her thinking, she stated that she recognized that she held negative biases regarding Persons of Color, ones that she continues to work to overcome. She questioned herself, wondering if she was only biased by working class African American men. In the following statement she referred to when she was around African American men and her guarding her possessions: “Do I do it only with Black men who are dressed in work clothes or do I do it only-, so, I’ve tried to be more aware of that bias.”

**Biases.** As a highly reflective individual and educator, Fran strove to recognize her biases and worked to combat the negative impact her biases could have on her students. These biases were formed from outside forces, stereotypes, which are prevalent in American society. During the second interview, Fran was reminded of a message communicated to the American public by former President Obama, she recalled his statement, “You know, there’s not a Black man alive who hasn’t gotten on an elevator with a White woman and seen her clutch her bag a little tighter.” This statement resonated with her and made her wonder if she had ever done that before. She revealed, “I’m even aware that I have, I’m biased by color. You know, sometimes I
have to remind myself that my initial reaction to somebody is a cultural thing, not based on any other information that I’m taking in, although I think I’ve gotten a lot better at that. I try to check myself on that behavior because I think that is like an implicit bias that’s easy to be easily forgotten or it’s easy to be unaware of it. Even someone like me, where I think I’m pretty aware of racial issues, but I know that I have that.” She continued, “So, I am trying to always be aware of, are my expectations different and do I expect more of African American children than I do for White children? Are my standards higher for them? Am I more accepting of errors in White children than I am of Black children? I think I do make a conscious effort to reflect on that. Whether I’m perfect at that, I can’t say really because that’s like a bias thing. I don’t think you become aware of, but I know it’s something that I check and try to become aware of.” Fran was aware of the impact that bias may have on teaching and learning and felt it was and continues to be imperative to address it.

**Influenced by school and district priorities.** Fran was aware that she was affected by district and building priorities. She felt that the achievement and testing culture has been revered by the district and a great deal of time has been spent preparing for and participating in test taking with a particular focus on improving the test scores of poor students. Another focus has been on learning how to work with students living in poverty and on the PBIS initiative. Faculty meeting time and district conference days have focused on training teachers and aligning their mindsets. Fran said, “The big, big picture things that affect the whole school that are PBIS things or the poverty issues, those I think are—move me more because people—I see peers from different areas of the school who, maybe I don’t interact with every single day, and I hear their perspective and it forces me to think, ok, so they think this, which is different, but they come from a different perspective, so it influences me more.” Peers sharing their viewpoints and
perspectives are more powerful influences over how she thinks about different subgroups of students.

**Conclusions.** Each participant shared the ways in which they were influenced by their familial values and beliefs, attributing recognition of students' character traits and social assets as determinants of shaping their perceptions of students. Two of the three participants stated that they were not influenced by societal stereotypes. Alexa confirmed that she believed she was influenced by societal stereotypes but was thankful that she didn’t have to “deal with racial tensions as a primary school teacher.” She was adamant that primary school aged children did not understand racial inequalities or potential tensions between African American and White citizens. Her concern regarding conversations on the topic of race as being something considered as taboo within schools underscores her and other educators’ discomfort in talking about Persons of Color and the potential that stereotypes or other obstacles may have in impeding academic progress for Students of Color.

Each participant expressed that their schools and the district prioritized providing professional development in working with students coming from impoverished homes. This was particularly relevant in the testimony of Julie who sought students who “fit the bill.” She looked for students who exhibited traits that typical poor students possessed and used that information for academic groupings and in identifying specific teaching strategies to use when working with those students. These school and district influences have the potential to limit academic opportunities for poor students and could promote negative self-fulfilling prophecies for students in believing they are less capable than their middle class peers.

It was noteworthy that none of the participants discussed any building or district priorities focused on working with and teaching Students of Color even though thirty-nine percent of the
student population was comprised of Students of Color (New York State Education Department Public School Enrollment Data, 2019). As a matter of fact, Alexa believed that any conversations regarding teaching Students of Color would not be supported or tolerated in her building.

**Conceptions of Cultural Capital**

The teacher participants demonstrated that they held notions regarding students’ academic aptitudes based on students’ social assets and their collection of cultural capital represented through the symbolic elements held by students. Such student elements identified by the three teacher participants were students’ social skills, familial social class status, familial structure (one or two parent household), level of parental support, work ethic, and what was perceived to be appropriate school behavior. It was found that students who shared similar forms of cultural capital with their teachers held a sense of collective identity. This, therefore, provided those students with an elevated position within the class, creating unequal opportunities for students within the classroom. The valued cultural capital appeared to affect academic decision making, potentially hindering or aiding students’ opportunities for intellectual growth and advancement in the curriculum.

**Alexa: Perceptions of families.** Monopolizing much of the conversation during all three interviews with Alexa was the importance of family, particularly regarding its structure and level of support from parents. Alexa believed that her childhood was a wonderful experience for her, and she wished that all kids could have similar experiences. Having two parents in her home with a mother who was able to stay at home to raise her and her sibling and support their educational endeavors was beneficial to both of them. Alexa said, “It was so effective and wonderful for me. It doesn’t mean it’s the only way to do it. And even though it’s what I would want for my own kids someday, if I have my way, I’d like to be home with my kids. But, again,
it’s not the only way at all.” She lamented over battling her mindset that many working class families do not care as much about their children as middle and upper class families. “I also work hard at not having the mindset of that means they [working class parents] don’t care because I don’t think that’s always true. It sometimes is true, but I think usually it’s not. I think usually, they care desperately about their kids and want them to have the best but are barely managing to hold their own lives together. So, they have a hard time helping their kids hold their lives together too. That makes me feel very sad for the kids and the family. I work hard at not judging the parents.” Her perception was that working parents are less of a stable and loving familial unit which was in direct contrast with her perception of upper middle class families as the epitome of what a family should be. Considering the socioeconomic status of families has the potential to assign a level of competence to students based on their objectified cultural capital.

**Cultural capital and academic competence.** Because Alexa’s parents were strong advocates for her education, students with similar levels of support and backgrounds were seen as potentially high achievers within her classroom. Parents with dissimilar parenting styles and values from her familial unit were seen in a negative light. Negative perceptions interfered with how she thought about and interacted with these children. The embodiment of certain values and behaviors identified students’ embodied cultural capital. “I struggle to separate them from their parents because, especially this year, I feel like the parents are mostly the problem. I really struggle to not see their parents in them [referring to her students], to view them as kids who need my help and not the parents I disagree with. That’s something I’m honestly having a hard time with this year and it does color my interactions with them [the students].” She explained that her family instilled the importance of being respectful, working hard in school, and finding joy in learning, which led to school success. Consequently, she also found that she made
judgements about students’ abilities based on their behaviors. She surmised that students with behavioral challenges were often lower functioning, intellectually, and that parents did not provide much support for their children at home. “When I first meet the kids, I feel like I make more judgements about parental support than I actually do with the kids. Because, you know, kids that don’t show up for the meet and greet, I go, ok—it makes me wonder—and again, there are working parents; mom was working, and I couldn’t get there. I always try to be careful of my judgements but, I would say, I could tell this year, the kids that I had the hardest time getting in touch with— their parents—did not come to the meet and greet. It doesn’t necessarily mean there isn’t support at home, but maybe there are other things that the parents are working on. So, maybe school isn’t—let me be—I want to be careful—I was going to say that school wasn’t the top priority. That may not be true—just timewise, there were other things that were more important at that time, which I get.” This passage sheds light onto how Alexa views working families. She sees them not as supporters of their children’s education, but individuals who prioritize work or other outside activities over their children. Alexa talked about trying not to judge working parents but struggled with not seeing them negatively. Her family values and faith taught her to be positive and accepting of others and their differences, hence she struggled with her bias towards working and single parents.

Academic decision making and unequal opportunities. Judgements based on students’ potential influenced how Alexa interacted with her students and the academic decisions she made for those students. As a primary level teacher, there were no state tests to identify students in need of remediation and those in need of enrichment. Additionally, she shared that the criteria for selection was very loose and based on teachers’ subjective judgements regarding student performance: “I think I’m a little more systematic about that than some teachers are. I will say
there are kids who come to me and I will say, oh my gosh, why wasn’t this kid on AIS before? So, I do think some teachers are not as systematic about it as I am.” This subjectivity in identification for enrichment or academic intervention services (AIS) created unequal learning opportunities for students.

When asked to describe who the high achievers and lower achievers were based on her nine years of teaching experience and her reflections as a former student, Alexa was uncomfortable discussing racial representations within each group. Speaking about poor students’ academic potential and representation was easier for her to address. Alexa explained how she needed to work hard to be conscious of how she treated her high achievers within her classroom. Students who were identified by Alexa as high achievers were students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, mostly White students with high levels of parental support. According to Alexa, this was due to a higher percentage of Caucasian students and the high socioeconomic status provided different enriching experiences for these students outside of school. Those external enrichment experiences were an advantage to those students in elevating their academic potential and status within the classroom. Alexa said, “I would say, the parental support helps me when I’m pushing and enriching students.” In considering Students of Color and poor students, she said, “I would feel like, if they didn’t make growth with me, I wouldn’t have done my job well. So, I would hope that they would still make growth. I think that I might be aware that there might be additional blocks to their success that students without that might have. With that being said, I think some of those kids have a lot more resilience than kids who grow up where everything is handed to them. And so, I wouldn’t want to take that for granted that they weren’t going to be successful.” Her reservations about these two subgroup populations’ abilities to make the same amount of growth as White, more affluent students,
pointed to how she appraised students’ cultural capital where some student groups were valued more than others. Alexa’s sense of collective identity and group positioning of White middle and upper class students may have created social and educational inequality for others from different subgroups.

Students who were identified as struggling learners were students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and she had seen multiple ethnicities in her lower achieving groups. She explained that she did not want her high achievers to receive special treatment over the other students who were perceived to be less capable. “So, I’m aware that, because I love enrichment and have some background in it, I do think of my kids I know I’m going to enrich in a different way, and I know I always try to be really careful because I don’t want them to feel like they get more special treatment from me than the other kids. Because I do make that judgement, I work to make sure I don’t single them out and say, hey, you’re special and you’re not.” However, Alexa described that she frequently had special projects for this selected group of students to challenge them and make schooling more interesting and exciting for them. Upon further reflection she stated, “So, I do think that that judgement I have in my mind, the groupings that I make, I do think about kids and groups in a different way. It’s something I, daily, try to make sure that I don’t convey to kids.” Her passion to work with students she felt deserved enrichment elevated the status of those students in her highest groupings, those who were predominantly White, middle and upper class students.

Julie: Perceptions of diversity. Julie shared that she led a very sheltered existence in her home community and elementary through high school years. There was very little diversity within her neighborhood and school with only one African American family and some poor families, the rest being White middle and upper class families. Her first encounter with working
closely with Students of Color was when she began working as a Head Start teacher on a Native American reservation: “My first experience teaching on the reservation was my first real life experience with a completely different culture than mine. It was very eye opening for me. What’s sad about their—and it was very interesting; I had learned the culture; I learned the language; I was teaching that, so I needed to learn it.” She began to say that the Native American culture was sad in some way, but she stopped herself and moved on to say it was interesting. The differences between Julie’s culture and that of the Native American’s embodied culture was perceived to be less favorable.

**Cultural capital and academic competence.** Her experiences during her first teaching position shaped how she perceived Students of Color and poor students. When talking about poor students and Students of Color during her interviews, Julie often spoke of them using a deficit mindset. In particular, the poor were viewed as coming from unstable and abnormal homes. She said, “How do we engage these students who are coming from poverty, who are coming from crisis, whose home lives are not the normal two parent home?” She also stated, “They’re living in stressful homes. They are not having the nutrition and the sleep. There’s not a culture of educational achievement there. Sometimes there’s not a value. Sometimes their parents look at us, you deal with the problem. It’s not theirs to fix. So, there’s not a lot of parental support.” When asked about teaching a class with the majority of the students being Students of Color and poor, her initial reaction was, “I think, initially, I’d think we’re going to have a rough year. I’m going to deal with students who are not necessarily ready to learn every day because of outside forces. But minority doesn’t scare me as much as poor. I think because I’ve had really amazing experiences with minority students, especially in an ESL capacity because I’ve had some kids who’ve made amazing gains. I think I’ll always look at minority and poor as I need to
work harder to be able to get them to meet the standards. I may have to work harder to make connections with the parents and families to help them do the things I need them to do at home. You know, it’s not necessarily that I’m going to have a horrible year, but I might have to work harder than with students who are from higher socioeconomics and White I guess.” The assets seen as valuable cultural capital from Julie’s perspective reinforced class differences that each of the subgroups possessed. These perceptions have the potential to further social divisions and hierarchies, which may lead to unequal educational experiences for different groups of students.

**Judgments based on social assets, student behaviors, and parental support.** Students’ cultural capital was used to identify which students were potentially high achievers or low achievers at the beginning of the school year. High achievers were perceived to be students who had rich vocabularies and had better social and communication skills. They were understood to be conscientious and aware of Julie’s academic expectations. Julie felt that assessing students’ embodied capital was an accurate predictor of student achievement ninety-five percent of the time. Julie laughed as she said, “It’s usually right ninety-five percent of the time, I’m right. But, it doesn’t to me, there’s not a race part there. It’s usually right, ninety-five percent of the time I’m correct. Those are the kids who have rich vocabulary. They can hold a conversation with an adult and with each other in a positive way. They have the support—you can just tell they have the support at home. Someone has rich conversations with them. They’re allowed to express their opinions and thoughts, and someone thoughtfully listens to them.” Julie made assumptions about who the high achievers were based on their assets and behaviors. She added, “High achievers were always the ones with their homework done. They were the ones that always knew all the answers to the questions. They were conscientious and knew what was going on and aware of what was expected of them academically. Sometimes there was a lot of pressure on those kids, I
felt like.” Julie communicated that in her classroom the students who were higher achieving academically were those from a higher socioeconomic status and were a mix of White, Asian, and some African American students.

While the perceived higher achievers in Julie’s class were judged based on their social skills, lower achievers were judged based on their outward appearance and emotion. In reflecting on when she was in school, she described the lower achievers in this way: “You definitely look at what they’re wearing. Are they clean? Do they look interested in life? Some of them are so apathetic, they’re just kind of there. I remember kids in the classroom who would just put their heads down on the table and sleep during the whole class period. And I don’t know whether they were sleep deprived or whether they just did not care.” She felt that the lower achievers had parents who did not support them, and they came from poor homes. “The lower achievers were also the ones who had the lowest socioeconomic status and unfortunately, it just seems to go hand in hand. The ones with the lack of parental support, weren’t parents who cared or attended anything. You know, parent conferences, afterschool activities, concerts at night, all of that support wasn’t there. Just a lack of anyone caring about what was going on with them. Sometimes it was a lack of nutrition and sometimes it was a lack of cleanliness.” These assumptions regarding students’ weaknesses placed the responsibility for student achievement in the hands of the family, beyond the teacher’s influence.

**Academic decision making and unequal opportunities.** As a kindergarten teacher, academic decisions regarding Julie’s students were based on both students’ performance on school-based assessments and teacher judgements. Julie explained that the first couple of days were critical in determining whether or not a student would be a higher achiever or a lower achiever. Judgements were made based on students’ school behaviors; attentiveness, having a
good attitude, being an enthusiastic learner, being respectful, and a good citizen. All of which implied that the student had the potential to be a higher achiever and might have qualified for enrichment services. Those attributes were similar to Julie’s family values and traits which Julie exhibited herself as an advanced student. The district required schools to block out time for enrichment and remediation services for qualified students each day. Julie explained that there was a thirty-minute block of time carved out on the schedule each school day for remediation and enrichment. She said, “It’s what those kids need at that moment or what I feel like they need at that moment.” Therefore, the teacher placed students in groups based on what she felt they needed at that time. Subjective decision making was used through teacher discretion to determine who received enrichment and who received remediation.

**Fran: Perceptions of families.** Fran spoke frankly about her perceptions of the importance of family in helping a child to succeed in school. In reflecting on her own childhood experiences in school and with her family, Fran explained how different family structures and systems were today than when she went to school. Reflecting, Fran stated, “I mean, looking back, well, I mean, anyway, I just think it’s very hard for kids. Their lives are so fractured, and they were not fractured when I was growing up because we knew every day at 5:00 my dad would be home and we’d sit down at the dinner table and even though my mother ran around like a chicken with her head cut off trying to get everything done, we all sat down to dinner. We had dinner, we talked at the dinner table about what went on, and then life moved on.”

Fran felt that the elementary school she attended had students and families with a higher socioeconomic status than the school she currently teaches in today and she felt her students have less parental supervision than she had. According to Fran, there was, for the most part, at least one parent home to raise and support children when she was growing up. Fran said, “There
weren’t as many working mothers. Most mothers stayed home, except for my mother. So, I think the kids who were lower socioeconomically than when I was in school, they at least had somebody always there for them to do, to put eyes on them. A lot of kids who I teach do not have that. They go to daycare or they go to an extended day program, or they’re at home by themselves. A lot of the kids who come from other countries, I think, are home alone. A lot of kids between two houses.” This perception that children from low income homes have less parental supervision or come from broken homes is a negative assessment bourn from Fran’s conception of her students’ and their families embodied and objectified cultural capital.

**Cultural capital, academic expectations, and academic competence.** Different beliefs, understandings, and expectations existed for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Fran shared that there were teachers within her school who were grappling with the meaningfulness and amount of homework issued to students. Fran said, “I think there’s a part, there’s an acceptance that for some students, life is harder for some students. And those students have to do everything on their own. So, when I would have said, hey, did you take out your homework? Hey, did you look in your backpack? Hey, what would you think about this? We know that some of our students have nobody who cares or who’s there, or the parent is so exhausted from working three jobs that they, they can’t look in the backpack.” This statement indicated an understanding that one’s socioeconomic status (objectified capital) was synonymous with the amount of love and concern that parents shared with their children and because there was no one who cared deeply for poor children, they were not expected to complete the same amount of work as middle and upper class children.

Being school ready was a concept that Fran felt was important for children to be successful in school. Being school ready required a family to have the knowledge and resources
to place their child in preschool to get them educated early, before they entered kindergarten. The training teachers had in the KCSD taught them that students from low income homes were not as prepared for school as middle and upper class children were. Fran spoke about the potential of poor children in elementary school when she stated, “Well, I would know off hand; we know that children who come from—who are born into poverty come with tens of thousands less vocabulary words. I’m talking about the elementary world now. We know that they’re coming with language deficits, so they’re going to need early interventions. Now at my school, in the 4, 5, 6 land that I live in right now, typically when we get new students, we expect them to be lower than where our students are. It’s not always that it happens that way. Sometimes we get kids who are, you know, brilliant, but generally speaking, if we get kids moving up from the city to our schools, we’re expecting that they are not going to necessarily be at the level of the Karisville kids. But that’s not to say that they can’t be there some day.” While much of the research points to delays in learning, believing that students from the city are poor, and that they must have learning difficulties automatically discounts the possibility that a student from a low-income household and potentially a Student of Color is on or above grade level which may ultimately impact academic decisions and programming for poor students.

**Academic decision making and race-based decisions.** Fran emphasized that she does not believe that students’ potential was limited by their race or socioeconomic status. Academic decisions at Karisville were based solely on assessment data, both classroom and state assessments, that determine which students were eligible for remediation or enrichment services. She believed that there were other decisions which were more racially-based. “I do not believe race plays a role in that, for AIS decisions. It is such a process that it would be almost impossible to make that decision solely on race or something like that because there are way too many steps
you have to go through. I think the times decisions are made about that are more racially-based are behaviors more than learning, that’s my perspective.” She continued, “Unless it’s a teacher who really doesn’t have a lot of experience with minority students or experience with students in poverty who really doesn’t understand it. I think those teachers may sometimes not understand how to distinguish between what’s truly a learning need, and what’s truly a behavior need, and what’s a cultural thing.” Fran explained that in a conversation with the school social worker, the social worker often saw “little Black boys lined up in the office.” If African American students were removed from class and sent to the office for disciplinary reasons, they were missing valuable instructional time. This academic decision to remove a student may prevent that student from learning or having other educational opportunities in the classroom. Fran believed that teachers without experience with Students of Color or poor students struggled to differentiate between learning needs and behavioral needs and that their judgements may have been skewed by not understanding different cultures. Therefore, a student’s cultural capital contributed to behavioral determinations made by teachers.

Fran was deeply impacted by having an African American friend growing up and witnessing racism firsthand. She felt strongly that she did not want a students’ race to be a factor in her decisions within her classroom or in how she interacted with her students. When reflecting on how her experiences influenced how she interacted with Students of Color and poor students she said, “I’m sure they do. I mean, I think, my experience being Cheryl’s friend has impacted my entire life. So, I don’t think I could ever let go of that because I would never say I don’t see a child’s color. I would say that I see everybody’s color. When I was in seventh grade it was like, nobody has color, everybody’s the same color. That’s kind of ludicrous. Everybody sees—you see the color. So, that it’s not that I don’t see it, and it’s not that I’m not aware of it, but I do try
to—I’m even aware that I have—I’m biased by color. So, you know, sometimes I have to remind myself that, maybe my initial reaction to somebody is a cultural thing, not based on any other information that I’m taking in. Although, I think I’ve gotten a lot better at that. But I try really hard to just look at the behaviors of kids and not who they are.” Because Fran’s best friend growing up was African American and she was judged based on her skin color, Fran worked to combat her bias to prevent it from infiltrating her decision making.

**Conclusions.** Assessments of students’ cultural capital was made based on students’ social assets as well as their familial socioeconomic status. Students who shared similar forms of cultural capital received advantages in the classroom by gaining access to more advanced curriculum as well as social recognition of acceptability. Students with good social skills, coming from supportive and well-educated homes led participants to form biased perceptions of children’s academic abilities, potentially advantaging White students with higher socioeconomic statuses over poor students and Students of Color.

All three participants held deficit mindsets towards students coming from poor homes. The participants expressed concerns about teaching a class that was comprised mainly of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students due to the lack of parental support and school not being valued in their homes. What was unique to Julie’s account was that she was the only individual who addressed concerns about teaching Students of Color, believing she would always feel like she needed to work harder to teach both Students of Color and poor students, while Alexa and Fran expressed concerns regarding teaching poor students only.

Alexa and Julie believed that academic decisions were somewhat subjectively based with teacher input being a strong determining factor. Alexa, in particular, recognized that she valued the cultural capital of students with similar backgrounds as her own. She actively combatted
providing special treatment to her gifted students, trying not to let her other students know she favored them. Fran was the only participant who believed academic decisions were not subjective and were based solely on academic data. She did, however, express concerns regarding behavioral decisions that she perceived to be race-based, ultimately impacting educational opportunities for Students of Color who experienced exclusionary discipline due to teacher biases.

**Summary**

The research question for this study was, “How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?” A subquestion, “How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making,” was used to support the research question guiding this study. Chapter four presented the data collected during this study which used semi-structured interviews with three teacher participants. Through analyzing the interview data, three superordinate themes were identified, grounded in the real-life experiences and words of the elementary teacher participants. The themes found in the data were the importance of one’s family and personal relationships and experiences in shaping one’s beliefs, the influence of societal stereotypes and school and district beliefs in shaping one’s perceptions, and finally, conceptions of other’s cultural capital and participants’ academic decision making. Each participant provided a personal glimpse into their thinking, formation of their perceptions and conceptions, and how judgements and decisions were made regarding students’ academic programming.

There were three female elementary educators who shared their thoughts, stories, and reflections of their upbringing, personal narratives of their educational experiences as students, and their interactions with diverse student populations as teachers. The participants in this study
ranged in age, one being in her early thirties, another in her mid-forties, and the last in her early fifties. All three teachers taught in the elementary grades ranging from kindergarten through sixth grade within two different buildings in the Karisville Central School District. Many similarities were found among the participants’ backgrounds: all hailed from middle to upper class families who grew up in two parent households with educated parents who highly valued education; each participant described herself as having an excellent work ethic, taking advanced placement or enrichment coursework during their schooling years, and having limited interactions with diverse student groups.

Throughout the course of the three interviews, the participants spoke candidly of their lived experiences. The participants’ word choice and reflections indicated deficit thinking regarding the academic competence of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. All three teachers were very comfortable conversing about students living in poverty; however, when asked to speak on the topic of race, they were often quick to change the subject or very careful in choosing their words. The participants shared that their buildings and the school district has had a focus on providing professional development on working with students and families living in poverty; consequently, these teachers appeared to be more at ease in speaking about that demographic population. Two of the three participants mentioned rising tensions in the political climate regarding race relations and their desire to be more cautious in what they said and how it would be perceived by others. Finally, because all three participants had very little contact with diverse students growing up, primarily socializing with White middle and upper-class students, and were in advanced educational tracks consisting of almost exclusively White higher socioeconomic status students, they had few, if any, discussions regarding cultural differences in education, culturally responsive practices or interactions, and
working with Students of Color. Because of this, the participants were unsure and hesitant to engage in conversations regarding race being that they were White educators.

Interestingly, all three participants recounted positive feelings towards tracking systems commonly used in education. Alexa and Fran, in particular, were strikingly candid in communicating the importance of the segregated classes which allowed a selected group of students, themselves included, to gain access to higher leveled curriculum and teaching methods to increase learning potential and have specialized experiences which other students were not privy to. Those exclusive experiences that all three participants partook in also transferred into their teaching repertoires in grouping students within their own classrooms based on students’ perceived abilities.

Based on the interviews with the teacher participants, to their knowledge, few conversations or professional development regarding race and educating Students of Color had taken place within the district. Two of the three teachers proudly shared that race was not noticed by them and was never a consideration in how and what they taught their students, nor was it a factor in enrichment or remediation decisions. While race was not consciously considered as a factor in how students were educated, decisions were inadvertently made which excluded students from participation in enrichment activities due to the perceived competence of Students of Color and poor students. One participant shared that she was very careful in making decisions that involved Students of Color, recognizing her own preconceived notions and biases, and she saw the value and importance of having open conversations confronting biases and stereotypes to reframe how Students of Color and poor students were viewed. This was in direct contrast with the other two participants who were glad that the races of Students of Color were never part of their decision making processes or their conversations at school.
The data demonstrated that in an elementary educational setting, students’ cultural capital was assessed primarily in the beginning of the school year, whether it was deliberate or unwitting, and was used to determine which students were privileged enough to have greater access to institutionalized capital. Students’ perceived cultural capital contributed to the educational opportunities provided to students as participants’ knowledge of societal stereotypes was internalized and their unconscious biases regarding the competence and capabilities of different social groups seeped into their belief systems, ultimately impacting decision making.

All teacher participants possessed preconceived notions regarding subgroups of students. The danger arose when participants were either unaware of their biases or if they denied the existence of such biases.

The next chapter will focus on connecting the findings of this study with the research literature. The theoretical framework of cultural capital theory will be revisited in the context of the research findings. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for future research will be provided.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of elementary teachers and how they viewed and perceived Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. The goal of this empirical study was to explore how the social assets of students were used to inform elementary teachers’ perceptions of students. In addition, this study sought to understand how elementary teachers made sense of their backgrounds, experiences, and the sociopolitical forces around them which informed their beliefs of students.

Much of the previous research data used quantifiable methods to make broad generalizations regarding teachers’ perceptions of students and linked their perceptions to disparities in achievement between White middle and upper class students and economically disadvantaged students and Students of Color (Jester & Fickel, 2013; Meissel, Meyer, Yao, Rubie-Davies, 2017; Obach, 2003; Ready & Wright, 2011; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006). These quantitative studies did not consider the opinions and perspectives of elementary teachers, in depth, to learn how and why teachers’ perspectives regarding subgroups of students formed and how their beliefs regarding the cultural capital of students informed their decision making in the classroom.

This qualitative research was conducted in the form of an IPA study to provide a forum to learn the unique perspectives of three White, female, elementary educators as they explored how their backgrounds, experiences, and how the sociopolitical forces around them informed their perceptions and academic decision making. Using the IPA methodology permitted the researcher to have access to participants’ understandings of their experiences of particular events which occurred at a particular point in their lives, nested within a social, cultural, political, and economical context (Shaw, 2019). Exploring participants’ histories, in their own terms, to
discover the significance of their experiences was a systematic examination of the participants’ lived experiences using a dual interpretative process (Shaw, 2019; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This involved using double hermeneutics as the researcher made interpretations of participants’ sense-making, focused on each individual, on a case-by-case basis, in order to examine the particulars before finally comparing each case to locate what the shared particulars were for the participants as a whole, as well as examining their differences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Shaw, 2019; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Elementary teachers lay the foundation of their students’ futures by instilling a love of learning. They teach children interaction and socialization skills and how to follow rules and expectations in a formalized setting, all of which lays the groundwork for students’ future successes in the upper grades and beyond (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Chu, 2011; Corenblum, Annis, & Tanaka, 1997). Since approximately eighty percent of the teaching force has been comprised of White female educators, and since more than fifty percent of the student population in the United States is comprised of Students of Color or from an economically disadvantaged home, learning about teachers’ positionalities regarding students’ potential for academic success is valuable (Ford, 2010; Jestor & Fickel, 2013). Three participants were interviewed three times using a set of semi-structured questions to answer the main research question and subquestion guiding this study: “How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?” and “How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making?”

In conducting this study, the theoretical framework used was Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory (1977). Within this theory it was surmised that students who possessed cultural capital were privileged within the educational system. This was due to teachers’ interpretations that
students who possessed cultural capital were prone to being more academically gifted (Andersen & Jæger, 2015). Utilization of this theory allowed the research data to be viewed through the lens of authority figures or gatekeepers within the classroom to understand how perceptions potentially leveraged advantages and elevated status for those possessing cultural capital while limiting opportunities for poor and some Students of Color.

This chapter commences with a discussion of the findings as they relate to each of the superordinate themes, which are: 1) That’s How I was Brought Up, 2) The Force of Forces, 3) Conceptions of Cultural Capital. Each superordinate theme had two to three subthemes that were situated within the current literature and connected to the theoretical framework. Following a discussion of the findings and a concluding statement, implications for practice will be presented. The chapter will conclude by offering recommendations for future research.

That’s How I was Brought Up

Each participant had a similar sociodemographic background profile. Each participant was a White female from a middle class background. Every participant attended a rural or suburban school with the majority of the student population being White and middle or upper class. Each was placed in an advanced schooling track beginning in elementary school, surrounded by mainly White middle and upper class peers throughout their educational experiences, limiting exposure to and interactions with persons from different socioeconomic classes, races, and ethnicities. Upon further investigation into participants’ anecdotes, because each had different interactions with their environments, various experiences with friends and in school, each individual’s construction of other’s identities was, in fact, unique and composed based on their personal experiences, including their distinctive upbringing and adolescent years. Although each participant’s differential experiences, pathways, and histories were unique, they
shared social identities with universalized characteristics, values, and practices which privileged them, causing participants to label others outside of their normalized group as inferior or abnormal (Briscoe, 2005).

Participants’ ideologies were rooted within conceptions held by their families and friend groups within the White middle class domain. Consequently, during each interview with participants, while they did not explicitly state that White, middle class students were more intelligent or had more potential than Students of Color or poor students, they may have subconsciously equated that students who held similar profiles to their own possessed a greater amount of cultural capital and were potentially more intelligent than those from other races or lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This was evident in contradictory statements made by the participants. Initially they would share a politically correct response that all students within their classrooms had equal opportunities based on their intelligence and not their economic standing or race. It became evident that, based on other statements made by participants, higher achievers were identified as those with profiles similar to their own, while lower achievers were identified as those with very different profiles than their own. In other words, while each participant said they gave each student equal footing in their classrooms, their interviews revealed that Students of Color and students of lower socioeconomic standing did not have equal standing in their classrooms. This was due to the fact that the participants’ identities were inextricably tied to the identities they ascribed to Students of Color and poor students and how participants tended to interact with students in those subgroups and the opportunities provided to them (Focault, 1980).

Understanding the social and spatial positioning of each participant provided a lens into how each participant’s unique identity formed and how their identities informed how they perceived students from various subgroups. Participants’ construction of their personal identities
and their construction of their students' identities were based on family values and societal stereotypes regarding others’ ethnicities, races, family backgrounds, social class standings, and students’ social assets. Academic groupings of students within participants’ classrooms were based on students’ social identities and constructed classifications. Booker (2004) contended that a strong sense of belonging and membership develops within the school environment; therefore, beliefs held by the teacher, based on her positionality, can cause divisions within the classroom by marginalizing subgroups of students through ascription of privilege or inferiority, creating various classes within the classroom (Foucault, 1980). This could have either a positive or negative impact on students’ opportunities in school and, ultimately, their academic successes based on their group reference.

The following section, Familial Structure and Support, connects the literature with how participants’ family values and their upbringings informed their beliefs regarding Students of Color and poor learners.

**Familial Structure and Support**

Teachers’ beliefs are socially constructed based on their individual positionalities (Banks, 2007). A contributing factor to developing participants’ positionalities was the influence of their family structure and their upbringings. All participants grew up in two parent households with influential mothers. The participants saw single parent family units as not “normal” and often equated them with a lack of structure, discipline, and care. In addition, participants saw more educated parents as being more supportive of their children’s educations. Hughes et al. (2005) found that differences in parenting practices, communication styles, and educational beliefs differed from White teachers, making teachers’ ability to relate to these parents and students more difficult. This was found to be comparable to Rist’s (1977/2000) research. He asserted that
a student’s family structure was considered to be influential in forming perceptions of students. He posited that teachers’ evaluations of students’ verbal skills, social qualities, leadership qualities, and appearance, the level of education that the students’ parents possessed, and the students’ family structures all contributed to teachers’ determinations of potential for students’ academics and behaviors within the classroom. All of the aforementioned qualities were cited by the participants in this study as important characteristics successful students possessed, which also were the qualities and characteristics developed and valued within their own homes as they grew up. The participants made it clear that their students’ verbal skills, social skills, leadership ability, neat appearance, level of parent education, and family structures were key indicators to student success in their classrooms.

Affirming Hayes and colleagues’ (2013) contention that teachers ascribed higher status and capability to students who aligned closely with their own normative middle class groupings, participants described students who were perceived to be from good supportive homes as those with more potential than students from single parent and/or working class households. Employment of a deficit mindset was applied to those who differed from participants’ own family cultures and values. This located students from a two parent household in a higher classification, granting them more access to educational opportunities, and subordinating students from single family or working class homes, limiting their opportunities in school. All three participants within the study heavily emphasized the importance of students living in a two-parent household with mothers being the influential cornerstones in their children’s development.

All participants’ families emphasized the importance of working hard in school and being respectful towards others. According to the participants, assessments of what working hard and being respectful looked like appeared to be very different depending on students’ cultures,
familial units, and socioeconomic backgrounds. At times, the participants’ expectations for their students’ work ethic and behavior differed from their students from poor backgrounds and from some cultures of Students of Color (African American cultures were rarely mentioned; however, Middle Eastern and Latinx cultures were identified). The participants felt that the poor and some families of Students of Color did not value education, nor did they hold high expectations for their children’s learning. They also noted that these student groups’ behaviors were more challenging to manage due to the lack of structure within their homes. More often, participants noted that students whose parents were positively oriented and supportive of school, held higher levels of academic attainment themselves, and those who were often of a higher socioeconomic status, were recommended for enrichment groups as well as being seen as more academically competent. This was found to support the work done by researchers who identified that educators attributed intellectual competence with desirable traits, thus reproducing social hierarchies within schools and classrooms (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Dumais, 2005; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Endepohls-Ulpe & Ruf, 2005; Parks & Kennedy, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

The following section, Friend Groups and Perceived Social Status, associates the literature with how participants’ friend groups influenced their beliefs regarding Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students and how those beliefs translated into social status for subgroups of students.

Friend Groups and Perceived Social Status

It was important to learn about how participants’ identities were formed and how they developed across different relational and ecological groupings like their family, educational settings, and peer groups. Family members were stated to be influential in developing an individual’s characteristics and values, but friends were also found to be instrumental in identity
formation (Borrero et al., 2012). During this study, the participants had similar friend groups. All had predominantly White middle and upper class friends, with one participant having a close African American friend in elementary school. All of the participants’ friends were in the accelerated or advanced tracks along with the participants, except Cheryl, Fran’s African American friend. While Cheryl’s family was highly educated and held the same family values that emphasized the importance of working hard in school, being successful academically, and showing respect for others, she was the only one of the participants’ friends not placed in the highest track. Fran believed that Cheryl was bright, but when her parents got divorced, her grades must have slipped, which was the reason Cheryl was not placed in the highest track. Cheryl did not hold the same cultural capital that she and her other friends held. Cheryl held all of the same qualities as her other friends with the exception of being White and from a two parent home, resulting in being placed in a lower track. It is possible that Cheryl proved to be less capable academically, justifying her placement in a lower track. It is also possible that due to her perceived lack of cultural capital, being African American and from a single parent household, she was assigned to a lower track.

Often, members of the dominant culture within the United States, White middle and upper class individuals, make cultural assumptions and generalizations regarding other cultures, reducing and disavowing them (Baldwin, 2015). This appeared to be true of our participants as they shared that Students of Color and poor families did not always support their children in their educational endeavors. This could be due to the participants’ lack of interaction with students of other races and economic standings. All participants were isolated in their advanced tracks with mostly White middle and upper class peers, reducing opportunities for cross-cultural friendships to form. Glock (2017) stated, “Research has shown that cross-ethnic friendships lead to lower...
levels of prejudice, and it can be assumed that a person with a larger number of ethnic minority peers will have a larger number of cross-ethnic friendships” (Glock, 2017). Participants’ monocultural isolation appeared to have impacted their perceptions of other races and socioeconomic statuses.

During participants’ interviews, each discussed that they did not associate with other students outside of their advanced tracks because those students, many of whom were poor and Students of Color, lacked ambition, drive, and the will to work hard and be successful in school. It was apparent that the participants and their parents did not value cultures different than their own. This form of “othering” peers was a socially constructed practice which aided in maintaining participants’ status through protective actions (Borrero et al., 2012). In order for the participants to protect and serve their own interests, as well as members of their normative group, participants perceived and represented students like them with elevated status (Briscoe, 2005). In participants’ discussions regarding their educational experiences as children, they recalled those perceptions as their own and the perceptions of their parents. They then reapplied those early conceptions of the poor and of Students of Color to their current perceptions of those subgroups of students in their classrooms, judging them to be lower achieving or to have less potential. This perspective was not found to be uncommon among current research.Researchers pointed to educators and policy makers viewing poor students as lacking aspiration and a drive to be successful, thus lowering their cultural capital and limiting their opportunities within the educational setting (Beckett & Wrigley, 2014; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014).

This next section relates the educational experiences of the participants with the existing literature.

**Educational Experiences**
All participants were recognized as having academic potential early on in their educational journeys. This may have been due to teachers’ perceptions of their academic potential based on a number of factors unknown to the participants. Andersen and Jæger (2015) posited that students possessing cultural capital, thus having the perceived positive qualities for academic success, were placed into higher tracks but were also apt to be incorrectly seen as being more academically competent. Participants from this study were placed in the highest tracks during their schooling experiences, enabling them to participate in enrichment and advanced placement programs. All had positive schooling experiences and appreciated the opportunities they were offered because they felt they had very rich experiences in school. One participant, while she spoke highly of her educational experiences, shared that she was incorrectly placed in an advanced math grouping in middle school where she skipped an entire year of the math curriculum. She admittedly stated that she was not able to keep up with the curriculum and struggled with math for the remainder of her school career. This was an example of misrecognition of academic brilliance by gatekeepers within her school district (Andersen & Jæger, 2015). While she struggled to keep up with the curriculum, this advanced placement kept her in the highest tracks with the “best of the best,” away from students who were perceived to be less interested in school and not as intelligent, allowing her more opportunities in a more advanced curriculum.

As an institutional setting, schools tend to reproduce social hierarchies, and educators in the field have a propensity to misrecognize those students possessing cultural capital as holding higher levels of academic ability over students who have been perceived to not have much or any cultural capital (Andersen & Jæger, 2015; Beckett & Wrigley, 2014). This held true for Julie when she was misdiagnosed as academically gifted in math. In the case of Alexa, she recognized
that she connected more with her advanced students and was cautious to ensure that the other
students were unable to perceive that she positioned them with an escalated social status within
the classroom. She was careful to not spend an overabundance of time with her highest
performers, so it did not appear that they received special treatment from her. Students’ social
status and cultural capital, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), could be used and
converted into capital to generate higher status and economic advantages (Beckett & Wrigley,
2014). This was evident in Alexa’s classroom where she awarded higher status to her advanced
learners over other students, and in Julie’s case when she received higher status through her
misidentified math brilliance. It is important to keep in mind that this was only possible if
members within institutions recognized students’ cultural capital as assets and equated them with
academic competence, which occurred in these instances (Beckett & Wrigley, 2014).

Andersen and Jæger (2015) contended that students who possessed more cultural capital
also converted it into higher academic standing and success due to educators’ recognition of their
cultural capital as academic giftedness, providing student placement into higher tracks with more
rigorous curriculums and better teachers. All three participants possessed cultural capital and
were placed in the highest tracks. All affirming that they had positive and enriched educational
experiences. Those families and students who possessed more cultural capital held advantages in
school, allowing them to maintain their privilege and the ability to reproduce their middle and
upper class status (Andersen & Jæger, 2015).

**The Force of Forces**

All three participants explored how their previous experiences provided context for
creating their beliefs and biases regarding Students of Color and poor students. They attributed
considerable meaning to the influence of school and district beliefs in shaping their perceptions,
but only one acknowledged the presence of societal stereotypes contributing to her existing biases even though all three participants demonstrated infiltration of external stereotypes into their thinking and academic decision making. All three participants cited ongoing and intensive professional development in working with economically disadvantaged students as a contributing factor as to how they perceived poor students. Participants actively sought students who met the criteria outlined in their professional development for working with poor students and then placed those students in lower tracks for remediation based on their social asset profile.

The following will connect the literature with how external forces such as societal influences and school and district priorities influenced participants’ perceptions of Students of Color and poor learners.

**Societal Influences**

The literature outlined an existence of sociodemographic biases in policies and practices within society and within the educational system which exacerbated inequalities for Students of Color and working class citizens due to the cultural disconnects between the dominant White middle and upper class authority figures and Students of Color and working class individuals (Ready & Wright, 2011). Being that the majority of the teaching force continues to consist of White, middle class female educators, there is a striking discrepancy between teachers’ racial and cultural makeup versus those of their Students of Color and poor students (Jestory & Fickel, 2013, Nan & Zia, 2011; Ready & Wright, 2011). According to the literature, a deficit paradigm has existed and has been rooted in the belief that intellectual and temperamental differences between racial groups were innate and unresponsive to educational intervention (Delpit, 1992; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). When Students of Color and poor students’ cultural practices, values, and characteristics were viewed as deficient, those students were believed by their
teachers to be less likely to attain higher levels of academic success than their peers from the dominant cultural group (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Because of this, teachers tended to overestimate the skills of White students and underestimate the abilities of Students of Color students (Books, 2007; Ready & Wright, 2011). This use of stereotyping and deficit thinking by individuals in an influential position could have lasting effects on student achievement (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).

Education has been inherently political and must focus on social justice issues and equity within the school systems, recognizing that learning must occur within social, cultural and historical contexts (Bettez, 2011). Prospective teachers have been “exposed to descriptions of failure rather than models of success” for culturally and socioeconomically diverse students (Delpit, 1992, p. 245). Students of Color and poor students have been often negatively labelled and have not been expected to perform as well as White, middle class students (Delpit, 1992). All three teachers expressed tensions within the political climate between Whites and African Americans and the need to be careful with choosing their words and topics of conversation within the classroom. As seen in the literature, hooks (1994) noted that teachers have been influenced by societal stereotypes and have been uncomfortable discussing race and discrimination in the classroom. The participants also cited New York State legislation and national policies aimed at decreasing the achievement gap between Whites and other racial and ethnic groups. Through their discussions during the interviews, the participants expressed that students had equal opportunities within the classroom with no one subgroup holding advantages over the other. Of particular interest was the fact that the participants communicated that throughout their schooling experiences and within their classrooms, the students most often placed in higher level coursework were White upper and middle class students. These decisions,
according to the participants, had nothing to do with race or social class, nor did they consider students’ socioeconomic status. The teacher participants openly and frequently casted a negative pall over the poor students in their classrooms, often employing deficit thinking models regarding their aptitudes and their familial values. This held true for Students of Color as well. Although the participants rarely spoke of aptitudes in their responses regarding Students of Color, the majority expressed apprehension in teaching a majority class consisting of Students of Color and that they would have to work much harder to support those students in meeting the New York State standards. Furthermore, not considering students’ race or socioeconomic standing eliminates opportunities to make connections between students’ home and community cultures to increase academic successes. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes the need to reduce ethnic, racial, and cultural disparities between educators and students by employing culturally relevant pedagogies which include the willingness to develop students academically through cultural competence and through developing sociopolitical and critical consciousness.

During all three interviews, the participants frequently cited family support and the family structure of Students of Color and poor students as the main reason for disparities in academic achievement between the different demographics of students. Students of Color and poor families were seen to not live in traditional two parent homes. Instead, participants described Students of Color and poor students’ living conditions as students lacking proper hygiene, receiving insufficient attention and nurturing, and all around appropriate care in contrast to the stability, love, and support White middle class families offered their children. This type of stereotyping established and maintained a hierarchy of power, characterizing subgroups of students as inferior and holding less cultural capital than the ruling class (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). This stereotyping was consistent with Books (2007)
where she outlined the societal and systemic issue of pinpointing variances in academic achievement by blaming parenting practices of African American parents and a failure to produce an academic achievement culture within schools due to the lack of focus on academics by certain subgroups of students and their families. Because schools are social and cultural contexts, societal stereotypes can be used to categorize and label students, placing them within existing hierarchical power structures (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012). Participants’ steadfastly believed in the cultural stereotypes that poor students and Students of Color have parents who are not culturally invested in education, preserving the existing hierarchical power structures found in society and the educational system. There has been a belief that White middle and upper class students have been more invested in education and, therefore, are more academically competent (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). This conception is also supported by Ready and Wright (2011). They explained that the social context of school is a fertile ground for the development of inaccurate teacher perceptions and that the social status of students is interpreted as an indicator of academic ability. These misperceptions and distortions in interpretations may stem from common understandings from privileged upbringings. Thus, explaining how and why the overwhelming majority of students placed in more advanced tracks are White and of the upper economic classes.

**School and District Influences**

A common thread among testimonials from the teacher participants was a clear district and building focus on standardizing and reinforcing expectations for student behavior through the PBIS initiative and targeted professional development to increase teacher awareness and skills in educating students from impoverished homes. A goal of professional development has been to provide a framework for educators to make the school’s and district’s vision and
expectations explicit and to ensure an effective delivery of instruction for all students (Ang, 2011). In one study conducted by Ang (2011), participants believed that professional development was “fundamental to their practice,” especially training that was supportive and suitable for their settings (p. 302). According to the participants, the professional development also included opportunities for educators to begin and maintain professional reflection on their current practices and to streamline professional ideologies and shift cultural and social attitudes toward educating poor children. However, based on the participants’ responses, the professional development actually contributed to inculcating stereotypical beliefs regarding students’ abilities, behaviors, and family practices of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth by indoctrinating teachers into believing that students and families living in poverty possessed specific traits such as difficult and chaotic home lives, behavioral difficulties, detached parents, and a general lack of commitment or desire to learn.

More modernized forms of tracking were employed in classrooms in the Karisville Central School District, sorting students into groupings based on their perceived intelligence with very little movement of students between groups in the highest and lowest tracks. The teachers who participated in this study disclosed that placement of students into different groupings were based on academic test scores and teacher judgments. Participants made judgements regarding students’ competence based on their social assets, including students’ social skills, familial class status, family structure, level of parental support, work ethic, and school behavior. Those outside factors, factors beyond academic ability, have been believed to influence student achievement and student placement (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Research has also demonstrated that schools help to reinforce the class structure found within society through tracking systems that initially assess students based on their social assets (Lopez, 2017; Rist
These assets have been defined as either valuable or as a deficiency (Lopez, 2017). When KCSD blocked out time to provide those in the highest and lowest tracks additional learning experiences, they essentially defined students’ abilities as either valuable or deficient, thereby marginalizing some groups of students and elevating the status of others. Those students who were considered to be the highest functioning had dedicated time for enriched learning, while those who were considered to be struggling learners received remediation. Borrero et al. (2012) called this form of tracking “categorization and labeling” used to “other” students and to communicate which group was the “smart” group and which was the “dumb” group (p. 23). These labels often came with differential treatment from teachers, indicating inferiority or superiority, and may have contributed to creating self-fulfilling prophecies where students either believed they were high functioning and capable or low performing and inept (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). One participant noted that she was careful not to give her highest functioning students too much special treatment, trying to conceal her passion in working with them from the other students. Weinstein and colleagues (2004), pointed out that students as young as first grade are capable of detecting differential treatment. With that being said, it is highly likely that Alexa’s students were able to recognize the differential treatment between those deemed to be of higher intelligence and those of lower intelligence, thereby creating circumstances where students began employing a positive or negative self-fulfilling prophecy regarding their aptitudes in school.

Concerns have been posited by researchers regarding the tracking of students and the lasting negative and cumulative affects it has on students’ future outcomes (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 2009; Lopez, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2004). Providing additional, more rigorous instruction to a small group of students restricted access to higher level teaching methods and
curricula, making upward mobility from the lower groupings nearly impossible (Fischbach et al., 2013; Rist, 1977/2000). This was confirmed by two of the participants, both of whom discussed having a great deal of movement between groups for students in the middle tracks, with the students in the highest and lowest tracks remaining fixed. Additionally, the sorting and differential treatment of students, again, sent the message of superiority or inferiority to students creating positive or negative self-fulfilling prophecies (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 2009; Fischbach, 2013; Lopez, 2017; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Rist 1977/2000; Weinstein et al., 2004).

Conceptions of Cultural Capital

In exploring teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals and how those beliefs shaped their perceptions, it was found through this study that conceptions of other’s cultural capital continued to be a factor within educational spheres. Participants frequently discussed that they held high expectations for all of their students regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status and that all had equal learning opportunities within their classrooms. Through deeper conversations in how teachers identified high and low achievers within their classes and their perceptions of high and low achievers, biases emerged demonstrating incongruencies with their previous statements. It was determined that socioeconomic status did, in fact, contribute to students’ cultural capital as did race, although race was never explicitly stated. While teachers were not comfortable identifying African American students’ as lower performers, they did assert that students to whom English was a new language were perceived to be lower performers, thus placing them in the lower tracks within the classroom setting.

The concept of cultural capital is mutually dependent. Cultural capital exists within the social world, but the social world is also found within cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977/2000). Students possessing and using knowledge of the dominant culture’s conceptual and normative
codes were positioned differently within the stratified social hierarchies in the classroom (Jæger, 2011). This has been found to be true in education and society because it has reflected the dominant culture’s ideological values, and the system itself, has tended to reward individuals whose cultural capital has been recognized as more valuable (Jæger, 2011; Montoya et al., 2016).

The accepted cultural assets, social traits and behaviors, and what has been perceived as intelligence, has produced unequal achievement outcomes and educational opportunities for those not belonging to the dominant culture (Montoya et al., 2016). This has resulted from educators’ exclusion of students not possessing knowledge of institutionalized cultural norms from participation in advanced or enriched curriculums. Educators have held conceptions of established dispositions and ways of thinking, and often Students of Color and economically disadvantaged persons have not had access to those structured forms of capital (Montoya et al., 2016; Navarro, 2006). This cultural capital has been seen as a source of power which has been re-legitimized within educational institutions through socialized norms guiding behavior and thinking (Montoya et al., 2016).

The proceeding section will connect the literature with how participants’ perceptions of students and their families influenced their expectations of certain subgroups of students.

Perceptions and Expectations

Teachers’ perceptions and expectations have been socially established constructs where teachers have created a standard in their minds of what makes a model student (Corenblum et al., 1997). This model student concept has been composed based on students’ social assets (Corenblum et al., 1997; Endepohls-Ulpe & Ruf, 2005). Corenblum and colleagues (1997) found that ethnicity has been a reliable predictor of teachers’ perceptions of academic competence and that students’ fathers’ occupations have affected teachers’ perceptions and expectations for
students. Glock et al. (2014) also found that teachers’ stereotypical expectations lead to biased judgments and contribute to educational inequities. Of concern was that teachers’ prejudgments have been found to hinder students’ academic performance and social status within the classroom, therefore, the infiltration of non-combatted stereotypical thinking can have detrimental effects on student success (Parks & Kennedy, 2007).

The elementary teacher participants all believed that race or ethnicity has never been a factor in academic decisions, nor has it been seen as a determinant of a student’s potential for success. However, the participants did hold similar socially constructed standards of high and low achieving students based on their social assets. While the participants have had pre-service training on the detrimental effects of stereotyping in the classroom, possibly leading them to choose politically correct responses to the researcher’s questions at times, the participants did subconsciously use race and ethnicity as a determinant for academic groupings. This lack of recognition of using race and ethnicity as a factor could have been due to a lack of cognizance of the participants’ own biases or a concern in offending others from different races by communicating that such biases existed.

All spoke of KCSD as holding high expectations for all students, just as they did in their own classrooms. What was significant to note was that all participants disclosed their explicit biases (without naming them as biases) as they felt that poor students had greater challenges in meeting the grade level standards and were often in need of more supports to be academically successful. Participants wanted all students to meet grade level expectations, however, the instruction that students received who were perceived to be higher functioning had more enriching lessons. This provided opportunities for students perceived to be higher functioning to exceed grade level expectations. The students perceived to be lower functioning received
remedial instruction and struggled to meet the standards. At least one participant mentioned that expectations for homework completion differed for poor students and another participant held higher expectations for her advanced students. This demonstrated a difference in expectations for subgroups of students. The participants, however, did not acknowledge the underperformance of African American students in comparison with other subgroup populations within the district. Within KCSD African American students were found to significantly underperform their White counterparts in both English Language Arts and mathematics (New York State Report Card, n.d.). This is concerning since studies support that Students of Color have been judged less accurately than White students, making race or ethnicity a factor in teachers’ perceptions of them (Glock et al., 2014). One participant discussed that her English as a New Language (ENL) learners were perceived to be less capable and in need of more support to be successful with the curriculum, making race or ethnicity a factor in how she perceived her students. This can become dangerous as students are inaccurately placed due to teachers’ underestimations of ability, placing students in lower tracks, and creating inequitable educational opportunities (Glock et al., 2014).

Participants did not see disproportionate numbers of White students perceived to be higher functioning. One participant said that she perceived Asian students as higher performers, holding higher socioeconomic status and that those families held higher expectations for their children. All participants conveyed that they had more White middle and upper class students in their higher groupings. They attributed this to the fact that their classroom populations have had majority White students. This is a plausible possibility since the elementary school population was sixty-one percent White learners (New York State Education Department Public School Enrollment Data, 2019). This would also cause one to assume then, that there would be a close
balance of Students of Color in the highest tracks, though this was never communicated during participant narratives. If Students of Color within KCSD did have access to higher level curriculums, then their performance on standardized assessments should be a close match to their White counterparts. This was not found to be true as White students outperformed Students of Color by approximately twenty percentage points (New York State Education Department Public School Enrollment Data, 2019).

Participants explained that there were excessive numbers of poor students represented in the lowest groups receiving remediation. Teacher participants also shared that their perception was that most Students of Colors’ families were not culturally invested in education and that their children were not always ready to learn in school, indicating that race was, in fact, a factor in the participants’ perceptions. Additionally, all participants equated working class families as more chaotic, less supportive of their children’s education, and needing more behavioral support. This is consistent with the literature where students’ classroom behavior and achievement have been culturally-based (Tyler et al., 2006).

Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2005) found that teachers tended to judge students based on a set of characteristics, or social assets, which either positively or negatively stereotyped student learners. This was found to be particularly true at the elementary level. Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2005) found that certain subgroup populations were at risk of being overlooked as gifted learners if they were perceived to be less motivated and if they did not demonstrate high levels of achievement on tests. Endepohls-Ulpe and Ruf (2005) emphasized that social assets were not an accurate indicator of a student’s giftedness.

While the focus of this study was not on correlating teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students with their academic achievement outcomes,
it is important to call attention to the achievement outcomes of students within KCSD, since participants’ perceptions were that Students of Color and poor students had equal opportunities in their classrooms. This would mean that Students of Color and poor students were equally represented in enrichment courses and held equal numbers of students meeting the proficiency standards. According to the New York State Education Department (2019) there were large gaps in achievement in math proficiency rates between White students and African American students during the 2017-18 school year in KCSD. These gaps averaged just over twenty-five percentage points with White students outperforming African American students on the standardized math assessments, while middle and upper class students outperformed poor students by an average of twenty-five percentage points. Similarly, on the New York State English Language Arts assessment (ELA), White students outperformed African American students by an average of eighteen percentage points, while middle and upper class students outperformed poor students on the ELA assessment by twenty-one percentage points.

The disparities in achievement outcomes on standardized assessments calls into question teacher participants’ statements regarding their perceptions, expectations, and how they used cultural capital to make academic decisions. Participants communicated that they held high expectations for all students, but implicit stereotypes may have contributed to teachers’ judgments and perceptions regarding Students of Color and their academic competence. Implicit stereotypes are unconscious associations, either positive or negative, regarding a stereotyped group. These implicit biases can be triggered by a students’ social assets or ethnic background (Glock, 2017; Petersen et al., 2016).

Peterson et al. (2016) found that implicit prejudiced attitudes tended to predict students’ performance. In this study, the students perceived to be higher functioning tended to be the
White middle and upper class students. Participants communicated the White middle and upper class students were more often placed in advanced or enriched groups. Placement in advanced coursework provided this subgroup with educational advantages with access to higher curriculums, leveraging their opportunities to meet or exceed proficiency standards. Teachers’ implicitly prejudiced attitudes may have contributed to White students’ elevated performances. Students perceived to be lower functioning were poor students, and participants appeared uncomfortable in identifying any races or ethnicities more often represented in lower courses. Of concern is an environment with low expectations for subgroups of students which marginalizes and ‘others’ them. In the case of our participants from KCSD, the underperforming subgroups were the poor and Students of Color. This was also true for participants throughout their schooling experiences. This is an example of where teachers’ implicit biases may have contributed to lowered academic outcomes. Teachers’ academic expectations for students have been shown to be lowered when race, gender, and socioeconomic background are considered (Fergeson, 2003). Marginalization of students has been shown to create a cultural climate where Students of Color and poor students’ potential for success may be squelched due to feelings of inadequacy, inability, and a lack of opportunity (Foiles Sifuentes, 2015).

**Perceptions of Cultural Capital**

Participants in this study demonstrated that they do use cultural capital to make judgments of students. Judgments occurred in observing students’ behaviors when initially being introduced to the students. They observed their outward appearances, their interactions with their parent(s) and with other adults and looked at their prior academic achievement on tests and used input from previous teachers regarding their work ethic and classroom demeanors. One of the potential issues influencing participants’ perceptions of students’ cultural capital could be that
they have been exposed to descriptions of poor and Students of Color in terms of failure rather than seeing models of success (Delpit, 1992). Societal stereotypes, district values and priorities, and through media representations, stereotypes of culturally diverse and poor students and their families have been brought to teachers’ subconscious, and sometimes conscious minds, influencing their perceptions (Delpit, 1992).

The differential positioning of students within the social world creates perceptions of students which are socially stratified (O’Connor, 2001). According to Bourdieu (1977/2000), cultural capital operates through teacher bias. When considering cultural capital in educational settings, researchers have determined that students’ cultural capital has led educators to form upwardly biased perceptions of the dominant culture’s students’ academic ability based on their initial assessments of them (Jæger, 2011; Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017). Certain cultural backgrounds and linguistic capital of students have been considered deficiencies or assets by educators (Lopez, A. T., 2017). This was true of the participants who made initial judgements regarding students’ academic potential based on their outward appearances, home languages, and social assets. Students’ appearances were representations of their objectified capital, and students’ embodied capital arose from their social skills, language usage, and behaviors. Participants also mentioned parents’ educational attainment and students’ prior academic standing (institutional capital) to inform their judgments regarding student potential. These judgements created social hierarchies and limited students by teachers overlooking their hidden capital (Beckett & Wrigley, 2014).

The cultural position of schools favors certain cultures and discriminates against others (Lopez, A. T., 2017). KCSD provided professional development to staff members in working with students from poor homes. This could be seen as either favoring poor students or
discriminating against them. First, this could be seen as a positive reaction by the district to address the changes in student demographics, thus favoring this population. Participants communicated that over the past ten years or so, the percentage of poor students in the district grew substantially. They reported that approximately forty percent of the student population now comes from poor homes (New York State Education Department Public School Enrollment Data, 2019). This demographic shift has been challenging for teachers as poor students have been struggling to meet the established grade level standards. This was evident in the New York State data (2019) where approximately forty-three percent of the socioeconomically disadvantaged elementary students tested earned a rating of proficient on the English Language Arts assessment. Sixty-four percent of the middle and upper class students earned a rating of proficient on that same assessment. Forty-nine percent of poor students were proficient on the New York State math test and seventy-three percent of middle and upper class students were proficient. These gaps in achievement may have triggered a response from building and district administrators to provide teachers with professional development to meet the needs of their shifting student population.

The second possibility is considering the professional development as a discriminatory practice. If the professional development was delivered in a manner that positioned poor students in a negative light, using a deficit mindset and diminishing students’ cultural capital, this could disadvantage poor learners within classrooms. If teachers had been conditioned to look for poor students and consider them as less competent than their middle class peers, as all three participants explained, this, by itself, is detrimental. Even though the intention was to provide students with additional supports to be more academically successful, it actually could have restricted their programming with teachers automatically placing them in lower curricular tracks.
Seeking opportunities to use a mindset from a cultural deficit model toward an orientation of seeking assets and cultural strengths would benefit both Students of Color and poor students (Borrero et al., 2012).

In continuing with Lopez’s (2017) assertion that schools discriminate against certain cultures, research has also shown that White teachers’ hold more negative views of African American students (McGrady, 2013). This was evident in the testimony of one participant when she told a story about a conversation she had with her school social worker. The social worker noticed that the majority of the students experiencing exclusionary discipline practices for behavioral difficulties were African American boys. This prompted the participant to reflect and consider if she held different expectations for behavior for her African American students versus her White students. She wondered if she was less tolerant of African American boy’s behaviors in her classroom. This is an all too common issue in schools. Khalifa and Briscoe (2015) outlined disparities in suspension rates of racialized groups within schools. They cited biases against Students of Color, judging them on stereotypes as African American boys prone to violence (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015; McGrady, 2013). Their study concluded that only three percent of the African American boys suspended warranted a suspension (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015). If teachers within the participants’ schools held more negative views regarding African American boys, that would signify susceptibility to racial stereotypes, removing these students from learning situations and limiting their academic potential.

The final subtheme connects the literature with participants’ conceptions of their students’ cultural capital and how those perceptions influenced their academic decision making.

**Academic Decision Making (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999)**
Teacher judgments can be informed by stereotypes, although they are not always applied in judgment formation (Glock, 2016). Glock (2016) found that positive exposure to Students of Color may reduce the impact of stereotypes, but generally they reported higher prejudicial beliefs when confronted with Students of Color. The participants within this study had very little contact with Students of Color or poor students throughout their schooling experiences. Each participant first experienced working with a diverse population when they began teaching. This limited exposure to Students of Color and poor students may have required teachers to rely on stereotypes learned from their upbringing or other outside influences, making the participants less culturally competent and thereby impacting their judgments. When asked how participants would feel about teaching a class with the majority of the students being poor and Students of Color, the participants reported that they had many positive interactions with Students of Color in their classrooms, making them less “nervous” about teaching them. However, all reported negative experiences with poor students and their families, causing a great deal of concern when they thought about teaching them.

Biases have been shown to persist against Students of Color within schools and stereotypical expectations of Students of Color have been shown to influence teachers’ academic decision making (Glock, 2017). With that being said, even though educators are aware of stereotypes, it does not necessarily mean they endorse or oppose them (Peterson et al., 2016). What Peterson et al. (2016) found was that educators were better able to suppress explicit stereotypes and attitudes versus implicit ones. This may impact teachers’ academic decision making if those stereotypes and attitudes were not held in check.

It has been found that teachers’ implicit biases influenced the type of instructional strategies used to teach Students of Color, affecting students’ academic achievement (Peterson et
Because Students of Color have been placed in lower tracks, they have had less academic success. If, how, and why elementary teachers place value upon a students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as their socioeconomic status and how such values inform academic decision making is an area that must be further explored. Understanding how the social assets of a student is interpreted by a teacher and understanding the teacher’s perception of their student’s social capital along with the value placed upon that social capital can lend insight into how academic decisions are made for Students of Color and poor student groups.

During this study, the three participants held similar academic decision making processes. All discussed institutional processes where educators used data to inform academic decision making with support and guidance from teacher input. The teacher judgments were based on students’ social assets deemed as desirable by the participants. The assets were: working hard, being responsible and enthusiastic, being a good citizen in the classroom, having satisfactory social skills and behaviors, and having families supportive of education. These assets were based on the values and traits their parents emphasized as important for them as they grew up. Each participant identified enriched or gifted students by first identifying their cultural assets as cultural capital, then converting them into institutionalized capital by providing them with access to more in depth learning and access to differentiated curriculums. This process demonstrated that teachers’ beliefs in the social assets of their students shaped their perceptions of them and informed their academic decision making. Students with more cultural capital were perceived to possess greater academic competence.

Participants’ decisions regarding students they deemed worthy of enrichment or remediation services were made based on teachers’ initial judgments in conjunction with using test results. Participants shared that the majority of the students in their higher groups were from
the White middle and upper classes and the students in their lowest groups were often from lower income homes. Participants also concluded that there was no movement from the highest and lowest groupings with some movement between groups in the middle tracks. This pattern was deemed to be typical of educators by Rist (1977/2000) who conducted a longitudinal study where children were placed into reading groups a few days into the school year based on their social and cultural assets. The students within the highest and lowest groupings remained in those tracks throughout the duration of the study, from kindergarten into second grade.

Dunne and Gazely (2008) caution teachers in making academic decisions informed by race, students’ socioeconomic status, family structure, and students’ social and behavioral cues, as research has shown that educators are more apt to misattribute students’ actual abilities. Additionally, teachers must be cautious about using prior teacher input and past academic performance and should be more critically aware of students’ cultures and infuse student cultures into their instruction to provide more equitable educational practices for historically marginalized students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lopez, 2017). Academic decisions which underscore ability groupings and teacher favoritism towards higher achievers have grave implications for student outcomes and threaten to reinforce the mindset that intelligence is fixed as opposed to malleable (Weinstein et al., 2004).

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this IPA research study was to uncover how the social assets of students were used to inform teachers’ perceptions of students. Using a qualitative methodology aided in expanding the existing body of knowledge by exploring in greater depth and detail this problem of practice by considering participants’ human experiences in the development of one’s perceptions. Using cultural capital theory provided insights into the power that the perceived
cultural capital of students held in teachers’ thinking towards Students of Color and poor students and how those perceptions influenced academic decisions.

The findings revealed three superordinate themes and eight subthemes that explained the importance of personal relationships and experiences in shaping an individual’s beliefs regarding others from different backgrounds, statuses and cultures, the influence of societal stereotypes and school and district beliefs in shaping one’s perceptions, and how the participants’ conceptions of others’ cultural capital influenced participants’ academic decision making. The superordinate themes and subthemes were: 1. That’s How I was Brought Up (with subthemes 1.1 Familial Structure and Support, 1.2 Friend Groups and Perceived Social Status, 1.3 Educational Experiences); 2. The Force of Forces (with subthemes 2.1 Societal Influences, 2.2 School and District Influences); and 3. Conceptions of Cultural Capital (with subthemes 3.1 Perceptions and Expectations, 3.2 Perceptions of Cultural Capital, and 3.3 Academic Decision Making).

The findings in this study supported much of the existing literature on how an individual’s cultural capital may leverage advantages and elevate status for students existing within the dominant culture. Such privileges obstruct progress and limit status for individuals from the non-dominant culture, maintaining a distinct social order within educational institutions. This study found that within this district, the classroom and organizational cultures did, in fact, continue to reproduce social hierarchies wherein the dominant culture’s, White and middle class, ideologies were used to define and evaluate students. It was found that the participants used a variety of factors such as a student’s appearance, familial information, past performance data, work and social behaviors, and maturity to influence the academic decisions which corroborated Riley and Ungerleider’s (2012) work. As noted in several research studies found within the literature on this topic, ability-based programming created tracking conditions
where students were sorted into differential pathways based, often times, on nonacademically linked competencies, stymieing intellectual growth for students placed in the lower tracks (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Weinstein et al., 2004). While this study did not measure academic performance in accordance with teachers’ perceptions, it did find that some students received preferential treatment in the form of opportunities for enrichment due to teachers’ perceptions of students’ cultural capital and equating those perceptions with academic and behavioral superiority. Additionally, as noted in the literature, individuals with less exposure and interaction with others from different racial groups, as seen with the participants in this study, may be prone to be influenced by cultural stereotypes and assumptions. This was found to be true of the participants as they described typical high and low achieving students; their descriptions were consistent with stereotypical norms of poor students and Students of Color being less competent, often referring to them using deficit terminology. Research has indicated that a possible factor contributing to achievement gaps are higher expectations for White middle class students compared to other groups (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999). As one participant vocalized, her school building had much lower standards and expectations for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Schools have been social systems with their own individualized cultures (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). According to the cultural capital theory, these institutions’ cultures have been built around the dominant class’ ideology. The dominant class’ ideology has consisted of educators’ beliefs of the qualities and characteristics which students must possess to develop them to their full potential in order to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful academically and in their future life pursuits (Jæger, 2011). This replication and validation of the dominant culture’s cultural assets formed a distinct social order based on students’ perceived
cultural capital, all of which reproduced the White middle class ideology and created class barriers, since the majority of the workforce found within education comes from that context (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/2000; Brogdon, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

In IPA studies, Smith and colleagues (2009) emphasize that one of the important tenets is to seek a closely defined, homogeneous group of participants for whom the research will be meaningful. This also provides insight into the particular perspectives on the phenomena being studied to represent that sampling’s viewpoints. While the participants within this study were considered to be homogeneous based on their sociodemographic profiles, there were psychological variations in participants. The manner in which participants made meaning of their life experiences and how they developed ways of knowing aided in understanding how they perceived diverse student groups. Each participants’ phenomenological world was constructed from their experiences in conjunction with their individual consciousnesses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Those subjective perceptions were actively created based on each participant’s involvement with their physical and social environments within a particular context and time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The participants’ understandings were then converted to a form of acquired knowledge based on their exposure to and interaction with their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because of the participants’ processes and ways in which they constructed meaning from their experiences, the participants were also heterogenous in nature while appearing to be homogeneous on their profiles (Smith et al., 2009).

The personal stories of these elementary teachers were viewed through a cultural capital theory lens. Viewing participants’ narratives using a cultural capital theory lens permitted the researcher to consider the validation of the dominant culture’s knowledge and skills accompanied by its cumulative effects, including rewards and privileges for some students over
others (Bourdieu, 1997). Evidence existed that participants not only experienced advantages and privileges as students themselves due to the recognition of their own cultural capital as White, middle class individuals, but social inequities were preserved by the participants within their own classrooms as they validated, recognized, and rewarded students who held similar educational beliefs, work habits, and familial structures as those possessed by the participants. While participants may not have been consciously aware of how societal and school district influences were prominent in how they perceived students, there was evidence which pointed to the power of these influences in perception formation as well as how academic decisions were made for students by participants.

Understanding each individual participant’s personal and social experiences and what those experiences meant to them provided an experiential account and allowed the researcher to “make analytic interpretations about those experiences and about the person as the experiencer” to better understand each participant’s experiences from their unique perspectives (Shaw, 2019, p. 186). Much like Jupp and Slattery (2010) conveyed in their research regarding White male teachers’ narratives and the structural and deficit understandings of student differences of race, class, culture, and language, the findings of this research provide educators and scholars the unique opportunity to unpack their own biases, preconceived notions, and understandings through continuous critical reflection and to encourage individual growth and evolution. Rethinking these ongoing tensions which occur within the conscious and subconscious minds of White teachers may shed new light onto how society and institutions contribute to the reification of White privilege and inequality within schools.

Implications for Practice
This research study found that race and socioeconomic status were significant factors influencing teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. Teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and poor students differed from those of White middle and upper class students. The participants were visibly uncomfortable discussing differences in perceptions between and among White students and Students of Color but were very comfortable talking about their perceptions of the poor. The teacher participants’ perspectives were often rationalized by the ongoing professional development received within their school buildings and within the district. Teachers voiced substantially more negative associations with regard to socioeconomically disadvantaged students, more so than they held for Students of Color. Conversations regarding the sociopolitical factors that influence educators’ perceptions of their students, particularly historically marginalized student groups, should occur.

It has been said that teachers who do not believe there is a necessity for change may be resistant to it (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) and “othering” individuals, separating them as abnormal or inferior is often a result of implicit bias and one’s positionality (Briscoe, 2005). Bringing about a consciousness of teachers’ beliefs and attitudes and exploring explicit and implicit biases must create conversations that open up possibilities of reducing misconceptions regarding students’ aptitudes, behaviors, and social assets, which threaten to continue inequalities within schools. Teacher training has been shown to raise more critical awareness of discriminatory practices and has been shown to lower incidences of discrimination (Lopez, 2017). This can only occur if the language used in the training uses verbiage that neither objectifies nor subordinates subgroups of individuals (Briscoe, 2005).

All of the participants believed students had equal opportunities in the classroom. This did not appear to be true. Teacher training is a critical step in aiding teachers in recognizing how
their perceptions form, how their beliefs and views regarding Students of Color and poor students are positioned, and the impact those perceptions have on students. Teachers are not always aware of their biases or the influence those biases have on their students (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).

Professional development based on this research should occur to shift educators’ mindsets in how they perceive and educate Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. Beginning with training to explore educators’ positionalities should be the first phase in a series of professional development experiences. This should include exploring the importance of personal relationships and experiences with one’s upbringing and family structure, friend groups and social status, and their educational experiences growing up. Next, a focus on the influence of societal stereotypes and school and district beliefs which shape educators’ perceptions should follow. Finally, educator’s conceptions of others’ cultural capital, including perceptions and expectations for students and the impact of one’s perceptions of cultural capital on academic decisions made in the classroom, school building, and within a district has the potential to shift the mindsets of educators as well as dismantling the social hierarchies which are reproduced within educational institutions.

Throughout participant testimonials and their narratives, the participants seemed to genuinely care for their students, and they became teachers because they loved working with children and loved the subject matter they were teaching. Based on the participants’ interviews and through their stories and reflections, they were sometimes consciously and, at other times, unconsciously conflicted. They wanted to share their stories but were concerned about communicating them in a politically correct manner. This indicated that there were tensions between what they had experienced, the way they thought and felt about their experiences, how
what they were communicating was to be received by others, and most importantly, how they believed they *should* feel about working with Students of Color and poor students. This could have resulted from having very few interactions and conversations within schools and across the district regarding teaching and working with Students of Color and their families. In addition, holding ongoing professional development focused on the deficits which poor students and families seemingly burden teachers and schools with, instead of focusing on the cultural assets they can bring to their learning, creates and upholds stereotypes. In this study, the ongoing professional development in KCSD helped teachers seek out students who fit the bill in possessing the social assets learned through their training. Using research-based materials during professional development is essential, however, instead of using interventionist scholarship from the onset that assumes participant support during professional development, a more pragmatic approach would be one that is initiated by exploring teachers’ positionalities and fosters an open forum for conversations about working with Students of Color and poor learners and their families. Teaching educators about cultural competence and the utilization of cultural assets can help transform the stratification within the schools. This would pave the way for staff members to begin feeling more comfortable engaging in dialogues regarding race more openly and shift the narrative of the dialogues for poor students. Only then would it be possible to access a level of consciousness and personal reflection that begins to acknowledge and confront existing biases to work proactively to combat them. This process would allow teachers to then reflect on their academic decisions and question how and why decisions are made and to challenge any building or district process which inadvertently produces inequitable practices for all students, strongly accounting for historically marginalized youths.
Of concern was that vastly differing perceptions occurred early on in students’ academic careers which have the potential to impact both higher and lower achieving Students of Color and poor students for years beyond the conclusion of their elementary schooling. The problem not only lies in the unequal opportunities presented to students, but also with the interpretation or reinterpretation of the beliefs in the ability of the student, by the student. The complex process of students’ interpretations of educational expectations and beliefs regarding their competence coupled with the bombardment of societal elements, including stereotypes, prejudices, advertent and inadvertent educational segregation from tracking systems, all result in the stigmatization and disenfranchisement of subgroups of students. Teachers’ racial and socioeconomic perceptions also appeared to be influenced by perceptions of students’ learning behaviors as well as their family structures and levels of familial support. Making judgments regarding students’ academic potential and intelligence based on their social assets and family structures can be dangerous. This practice could seal the fate of already marginalized students, preventing them from gaining valuable cultural capital.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

An important question to be considered for future research would be whether or not African American and Latinx teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and poor students differ from those of White teachers, as well as teachers coming from lower socioeconomic family backgrounds versus middle class backgrounds. Future research should also investigate alternative explanations for these results to develop connections between how teachers cultivate their perceptions of students and the impact of cultural capital on teachers’ perceptions. This may include mixed methods studies on the connections between teachers’ perceptions in correlation with racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps to learn more about the complex differences in
academic growth between subgroups of student populations. The benefit of mixed methods studies would be to seek out stories, feelings, and opinions of educators which could be quantifiably analyzed to draw additional conclusions on such a consequential topic in education (Butin, 2010).
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Appendix A

Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Mr. Wright,

I am a doctoral candidate and student researcher through Northeastern University. I am currently working on my dissertation to study teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students’ academic capabilities. The purpose of this letter is to request permission to conduct a qualitative research study in your elementary schools.

As we discussed earlier this summer, my research interest and passion is focused on social justice issues in education. As you are keenly aware, there are unexplained achievement and excellence gaps in education and my research seeks to understand a different perspective, which may point to new factors contributing to widening this gap or sustaining it. This qualitative research study will use an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to ascertain the perspectives of elementary teachers in great detail and in depth. This research will explore the value elementary teachers place on students’ racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors as determinants of academic potential by examining the influence of elementary teachers’ lived experiences. Understanding how elementary teachers make sense of their own backgrounds, the sociopolitical forces, belief systems, and the social assets of their students will contribute new understandings that delve deeper into the thought processes and interactions of teachers with diverse student groups coming from differing backgrounds and experiences.

This research has the potential to impact the elementary teachers participating in the study as well as your school district by considering education as an equitable and cultural practice. Participants and the district will have the unique opportunity to learn more about how teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and poor students influence their interactions with diverse subgroups of students. Consideration of shifting classroom practices, school and district wide policies, and professional development for teachers in recognizing their biases could result from this work. In addition, this research will enable scholars and practitioners to acquire a better understanding of educators’ interpretations of their experiences, and formational understanding of their perceptions of students’ abilities within their contexts related to their educational decision making.

To conduct this research, I would be seeking voluntary participants who are elementary teachers. Those selected to participate would be asked to partake in three one-to-one interviews with me at a time and location of their choosing, outside of working hours. Participation in this study would not interrupt educators’ teaching responsibilities or student learning in any way.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 585-645-4384 or via email at ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Respectfully,

Danielle Ouillette
EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Elementary Teachers,

I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, and I am currently working on my dissertation. I have received permission from Mr. Wright and approval from the Northeastern University Internal Review Board to conduct my research study in the elementary schools in the Rush-Henrietta Central School District. I am asking that you consider participating in the study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your participation and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information will ever be published as pseudonyms for participants and for the district will be used. If you decide to participate, you may opt to cease your participation at any time. You would be asked to partake in three separate interviews with me, each lasting approximately one hour.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand individual teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. The intent is to learn about individual teachers’ experiences with their families, education, and within the workplace to identify forces which contribute to developing individuals’ conceptions of students. This topic is highly personal and can be sensitive in nature but is valuable in seeking ways in which educators can identify new practices, strategies, and interventions which support framing learning as a cultural practice.

Your participation is meaningful to the success of the research study. To conduct this research, I will be seeking voluntary participants who are elementary teachers. Those selected to participate would be asked to partake in three one-to-one interviews with me at a time and location of their choosing, outside of working hours. Participation in this study would not interrupt educators’ teaching responsibilities or student learning in any way.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 585-645-4384 or via email at ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu. If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete and email me the attached Research Study Information Sheet.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Danielle Ouillette
EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu
This research study is being conducted by a doctoral candidate, Danielle Ouillette, from Northeastern University and I am working on my dissertation. The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand individual teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. The intent is to learn about individual teachers’ experiences with their families, educational experiences, and experiences within the workplace to identify forces which contribute to developing individuals’ conceptions of students’ abilities. This topic is highly personal and can be sensitive in nature but is valuable in seeking ways in which educators can identify new practices, strategies, and interventions which support framing learning as a cultural practice.

The research seeks three to six elementary teachers as participants who are willing and able to discuss these personal and sensitive topics in-depth with the researcher. Your participation is completely voluntary, and responses will be kept confidential. Administration will not be notified of your participation, nor will they receive any of your responses to interview questions. Any reports or publications as a result of this research will protect your anonymity as well as the anonymity of the district itself. If you are selected to participate and later, you decide not to participate, for any reason, you can cease your participation and your responses will not be included in the final report.

If you think you might be interested in being considered as a participant in this study, please complete the form below and email it to ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu. You will receive notification from the researcher of receipt of your email and notification as to whether or not you have been selected to participate in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of interested teacher</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status growing up (lower, middle, upper class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of years as an elementary teacher</td>
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<td>Grade(s) you teach (or subject)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you willing to participate in three separate one-to-one, one hour interviews with the researcher (based on your availability and a location of your choice)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you able to share your personal views, feelings, and reflections on sensitive topics involving race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?</td>
<td>Phone #:</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you feel comfortable with sharing the above information and would like to be considered as a participant in this study, please share your contact information and circle the preferred mode of communication (phone or email).</td>
<td>Email address:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preferred mode of communication: Phone or Email</td>
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Appendix D

Email Transcript for Teachers Not Able to Participate

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for expressing interest in this study. The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand individual teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. This work will be an in-depth investigation to learn more about teachers’ experiences and to identify how individuals develop their ideas, understandings, and perceptions of various subgroups of students. This work seeks to identify practices, strategies, and interventions to support framing learning as a cultural practice.

Because this research is qualitative in nature and will require participants to discuss personal and sensitive topics with me through a series of interviews, the number of participants involved in the research will be small. This is to allow participants an opportunity to speak at length regarding personal experiences from various contexts and periods in their lives. At this time, I currently have enough participants to fill this study. Should any participants decide they wish to no longer participate, I may contact you to see if you are still willing and able to participate in this work.

Thank you again for your time and willingness to participate and I hope we have the opportunity to work together in the future.

Sincerely,

Danielle Ouillette
EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu
Appendix E

Email or Phone Transcript for Participating Teachers

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for expressing interest in this study. The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand individual teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. This work will be an in-depth investigation to learn more about teachers’ experiences and to identify how individuals develop their ideas, understandings, and perceptions of various subgroups of students. This work seeks to identify practices, strategies, and interventions to support framing learning as a cultural practice.

Because this research is qualitative in nature and will require you to discuss personal and sensitive topics with me through a series of interviews, the number of participants involved in the research will be small. This is to allow us an opportunity to speak at length regarding personal experiences from various contexts and periods in your life. You will be asked to participate in three separate interviews with me at a time and location of your choosing. Participation is completely voluntary and kept strictly confidential, as will be your responses during the interviews. Any reports or publications as a result of this research will protect your anonymity as well as the anonymity of the district. You have the right to cease your participation in this study at any time and your responses will not be included in the final report.

This is a very brief overview of the research study. I look forward to meeting with you in the very near future to further discuss this study in greater detail and to answer any questions you might have regarding your participation. Please let me know a convenient time to discuss scheduling our first interview. In the meantime, I will send you the consent form for your review, which we will go over during our first meeting together.

Thank you again for your time and willingness to participate in this valuable work.

Sincerely,

Danielle Ouillette
EdD Candidate
Northeastern University
ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu
Appendix F
Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Principal Investigator: Quannah Parker-McGowan, PhD
Student Researcher: Danielle Ouillette
Title of Project: Teachers’ Perceptions of Students of Color and Low Socioeconomic Status Students

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions you might have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you would like to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are invited to participate in this study because you are an elementary educator who has worked with a diverse group of students.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to understand how elementary school teachers perceive the potential of their students.

What will I be asked to do?
Your participation in this research is voluntary. Three to six elementary teachers will be asked to participate in three separate, one-to-one interviews with the researcher to discuss their experiences with diverse student populations. Each interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. The discussion topics will include talking about your familial and educational experiences growing up and will connect to the experiences you have had with your students. To protect your privacy and the privacy of others who participate, participation and identity will not be disclosed and no information that would identify you will be included.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be asked to participate in a one hour interview one time per week for three weeks. You will be interviewed at a time and in a location of your choice. This location should be private, so we can have a conversation that will not be interrupted.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Answering questions or talking with others about your personal experiences can be difficult. If there are any questions you are not comfortable answering, you may choose not to answer the question and you can stop your participation in the study at any time. Because your interview will be solely with the researcher, your participation in the study and your responses will be kept confidential.
Will I benefit by being in this research?
While you may not receive a direct benefit from participation in this study, some people find sharing their stories to be a valuable experience. The hope is that this study will contribute to identifying how individual teachers develop their perceptions of diverse groups of students.

Who will see the information about me?
Your participation in this study will be confidential. To protect confidentiality, your real name and any other names that surface during interviews will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way, or any individual, as being part of this project.
To protect your personal information, all audio tapes will be kept in a privacy protected and encrypted software program, on a password protected computer until the conclusion of this research, and then they will be destroyed. The audio tapes will be transcribed, word-for-word. There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly. In rare instances, authorized people from Northeastern University may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
If you suffer from harm as a result of your participation in this research, you can be referred to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program provides a limited number of sessions and is at no cost to you. EAP provides a wide range of services to employees, including mental health counseling, if needed.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question, for any reason. Even if you begin the study, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to stop participating, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a teacher within the district.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have questions about this study, please feel free to contact Danielle Ouillette at ouillette.d@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Quannah Parker-McGowan at q.parker-mcgowan@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director of Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will not receive any form of payment for participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
To participate, you must have been a teacher for at least three years prior to engaging in this study.

**I agree to take part in this research.**
By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study. As part of my consent, I agree to be audiotaped.

_______________________________________________  ____________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part          Date

_______________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix G

Interview Protocol Form: First Interview

School:

Interviewee:

Researcher: Danielle Ouillette, Doctoral student at Northeastern University

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?

RESEARCH SUBQUESTION: How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making?

Introductory Protocol
I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview aspect of this study. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University conducting research on teachers’ perceptions of Students of Color and low socioeconomic status students. You have been selected to speak with me today because you appear to be someone who has a great deal to share about your interpretations of the social assets of students. My research project focuses on the experiences of elementary teachers and how they consider students’ potential and capacity for learning in the school setting. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into your experiences and how identity and other forces contribute to conceptions of students’ abilities. The hope is that this information will allow me to identify ways in which new practices, strategies, and interventions can be introduced to support framing learning as a cultural practice.

I realize that you have already signed the consent form and have agreed to participate in this study and be audio recorded as part of the process. Because your responses are important, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like your permission, again, to record this session today. Recording this will provide me with the opportunity to review and reflect on your responses to deepen my understanding of your perspective on this topic. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [If yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment. If no, end the interview and thank the participant for his or her time]. I will also be taking written notes while you share your experiences. Your responses are confidential, and a pseudonym will be used in any materials that are disseminated as a result of this interview. I will be the only one privy to the recording which will eventually be deleted after it is transcribed, and the research study concludes.

Begin the recording for the interview.
This interview should last about an hour, during which time I’ll be asking you a series of questions where you will describe your experiences. As previously stated, you may choose to participate in this study and your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, this interview will be recorded with your permission. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions at this time for me? (If yes, address them, if no, move on to the interview questions).
**First Interview**

To begin the interview, I would like to ask you about your family, background, and experiences in school.

1. Think back to your childhood, your family, and growing up. What were some of the shared family values that you and your family had when you were growing up?
   a. What did your family emphasize as being important?

2. How did those family values impact you, both personally and as an educator?
   a. Where do you see those values coming through as an educator?

3. How would you describe your friend group?
   a. What were their ethnicities and cultures like?
   b. How did your family values compare to your friends’ family values?

4. What type of school district did you attend?
   a. What did the student population look like? (Diversity?)
   b. What types of students did you hang around with?
   c. Why do you think you chose that friend group?

5. Can you describe who you thought the “high achievers” were and who the “low achievers” were?
   a. What made you think that?

6. Can you tell me about some of your educational experiences when you were growing up?
   a. Can you speak to the types of program options that were available to you? For example, different reading or math groups/levels, enrichment or advanced placement classes?
      i. What types of students were in each program/level?

7. How do your childhood and educational experiences shape how you think about and how you feel about education today?
   a. Can you make any connections with your family values and what you believe are valuable assets for students to be successful in school?
   b. What does a successful student look like?

8. How does the school you are currently teaching in compare to the school you attended as a child?
   a. How do you view these differences and what does it mean to you?
   b. How do you think these differences impact your students’ learning opportunities?

**Concluding statements:**

I appreciate you taking time to meet with me today and to participate in this study. I enjoyed learning more about you and your experiences. I will be listening to the audiotapes and typing up a transcription of this interview that will contribute to this research study. As I consider your responses and reflect on this interview, I may have some further questions for clarification to make sure I understand your thoughts and experiences correctly. If this is the case, may I contact you to speak with you further to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations? Do you have any questions for me at this time? Should you find you have questions for me, please feel free to contact me. Thank you again for your time and I look forward to meeting with you again to hear more about your experiences.
Appendix H
Interview Protocol Form: Second Interview

School:

Interviewee:

Researcher: Danielle Ouillette, Doctoral student at Northeastern University

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?

RESEARCH SUBQUESTION: How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making?

Introductory Protocol

I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in the second round of interviews. I appreciated the time you set aside to meet with me for the first round of interviews. Again, to remind you of my purpose in interviewing you, I would like to gain more insight into your experiences and how identity and other forces contribute to your conceptions of students. The hope is that this information will allow me to identify ways in which new practices, strategies, and interventions can be introduced to support framing learning as a cultural practice.

I realize that you have already signed the consent form and have agreed to participate in this study and be audio recorded as part of the process. Because your responses are important, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like your permission, again, to record this session today. Recording this will provide me with the opportunity to review and reflect on your responses to deepen my understanding of your perspective on this topic. Do I have your permission to record this interview again? [If yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment. If no, end the interview and thank the participant for her time]. I will also be taking written notes while you share your experiences. Your responses are confidential, and a pseudonym will be used in any materials that are disseminated as a result of this interview. I will be the only one privy to the recording which will eventually be deleted after it is transcribed, and the research study concludes.

Begin the recording for the interview.
This interview should last about an hour, during which time I’ll be asking you a series of questions where you will describe your experiences. As previously stated, you may choose to participate in this study and your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, this interview will be recorded with your permission. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions at this time for me? (If yes, address them, if no, move on to the interview questions).
During the first interview, we focused mainly on your family and your educational experiences. Today we will focus on making connections between your family and your educational experiences and consider the students you teach or have taught in your classroom.

**Second Interview**

1. Think about your school and your district. What are the shared values within the school/district?
   a. What makes you think that?
2. What are the focal points for faculty meetings, professional development, and resources given to you by your school/district?
   a. How do those meetings and resources contribute to how you think about students in your classroom?
3. You’ve shared with me some of the focal points for faculty meetings, professional development, and resources given to you by your school/district. Can you share some of the common understandings or beliefs regarding the academic competence of students within your school?
   a. Where do these understandings or beliefs stem from?
   b. Have you found any of these understandings or beliefs to be true of the students you have worked with as an elementary teacher?
4. Are your family values similar or different to the values held within your school/district?
   a. In what ways?
5. In what ways are the values you have held, growing up and presently, represented in your classroom?
   a. In what ways are they similar or different?
6. In what ways do your experiences growing up (family values, educational experiences, friend groups, etc.) influence how you view diverse groups of students?
7. Think about when students first enter your classroom. (This could be when there is a “meet and greet” with the teacher, or on the first day of school). How do you determine which students might be high achievers and which students might need extra help?
   a. How do you think those judgments influence how you interact with your students (the frequency and type of feedback they receive, the amount of time you spend instructing them, placement or academic decisions made)?
8. What are the structures built within the school/district for enrichment and for extra help?
   a. From your experience, what are the shared understandings within the school/district as to who or what may qualify students for enrichment or extra help?
9. In thinking of students in your classroom, both past and present, which types or groups of students are most represented in need of enrichment, academic intervention services, or special education services?
   a. If there is an overrepresentation of one subgroup of students over others, what do you attribute this to?
10. How do the students represented in your enrichment groups compare to your initial perceptions of those you thought to be potential high performers?
a. How do the students receiving academic intervention services or additional support services compare to those you initially perceived as potentially low performers?

b. Do you find your initial judgments to often be correct or incorrect? Why do you think that is?

11. How do you think your beliefs and understandings compare to the beliefs and understandings shared by your school/district?

   a. How do your beliefs, and those of the school, impact how you interact with and instruct your students (the amount of feedback given to a student, the amount of time spent working with a student to provide enrichment or extra help, etc.)?

Concluding Statements:
I appreciate you taking time to meet with me today and to participate in this study. Your thoughts and experiences are important to me and are valuable in working to understand teachers’ perceptions of their students. I enjoyed learning more about your thoughts and experiences in your school and with your students. I will be listening to the audiotapes and typing up a transcription of this interview that will contribute to this research study. As I consider your responses and reflect on this interview, I may have some further questions for clarification to make sure I understand your thoughts and experiences correctly. If this is the case, may I contact you to speak with you further to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations? Do you have any questions for me at this time? Should you find you have questions for me, please feel free to contact me. Thank you again for your time and I look forward to meeting with you one more time to hear more about your experiences.
Appendix I

Interview Protocol Form: Third Interview

School:

Interviewee:

Researcher: Danielle Ouillette, Doctoral student at Northeastern University

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do teachers’ beliefs in the cultural capital of individuals shape their perceptions of students?

RESEARCH SUBQUESTION: How do elementary teachers’ beliefs of the cultural capital of students inform their academic decision making?

Introductory Protocol

I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in the third, and final round of interviews. I appreciated the time you set aside to meet with me for the first two rounds of interviews. Again, to remind you of my purpose in interviewing you, I would like to gain more insight into your experiences and how identity and other forces contribute to conceptions of students. The hope is that this information will allow me to identify ways in which new practices, strategies, and interventions can be introduced to support framing learning as a cultural practice.

I realize that you have already signed the consent form and have agreed to participate in this study and be audio recorded as part of the process. Because your responses are important, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like your permission, again, to record this session today. Recording this will provide me with the opportunity to review and reflect on your responses to deepen my understanding of your perspective on this topic. Do I have your permission to record this interview again? [If yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment. If no, end the interview and thank the participant for her time]. I will also be taking written notes while you share your experiences. Your responses are confidential, and a pseudonym will be used in any materials that are disseminated as a result of this interview. I will be the only one privy to the recording which will eventually be deleted after it is transcribed, and the research study concludes.

Begin the recording for the interview.

This interview should last about an hour, during which time I’ll be asking you a series of questions where you will describe your experiences. As previously stated, you may choose to participate in this study and your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, this interview will be recorded with your permission. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Do you have any questions at this time for me? (If yes, address them, if no, move on to the interview questions).

During the second interview, we focused mainly on your experiences with students in your classroom, both past and present, and we talked about the school norms and belief systems.
Today we will focus on making connections between your belief systems and how other forces influence perceptions of students and academic decision making.

Third Interview

1. If your administrator told you the majority of your students would be Students of Color and poor students, what would be your initial reaction?
   a. What would you think the academic success of your students might be?
   b. How would you prepare to teach these students at the beginning of the school year?
   c. (If not addressed in previous statements) How do you, personally view Students of Color and poor learners’ scholastic aptitudes?

2. In thinking about how Students of Color and poor student learners are viewed in your school, how do you think these conceptions influence the academic decisions you make regarding these learners in your classroom?
   a. Do you think the societal portrayal of different subgroups of individuals influences you? If so, in what way? If not, how do you prevent stereotypes from influencing you?

3. What is the process you use, and possibly a structure outlined by your school, to make academic decisions for your students?
   a. Do you find the process you described provides equal opportunities for different subgroups of students in your classroom/school?

4. Can you describe any times when your initial perceptions of Students of Color or poor students’ academic abilities might have been different from their actual demonstrated abilities in the classroom?
   a. If yes, why might your perceptions have been different? What lead you to believe the student was a high/low achiever?
   b. If (no) the teacher cannot think of a time when her perceptions were different from the reality of students’ academic abilities, ask: What is the process you have been following to make sure you don’t misjudge a students’ abilities?

5. In what ways do your perceptions of students influence your academic decisions?
   a. Students opportunities for enrichment in the classroom, one-to-one assistance from you, the level of difficulty for reading/math?

6. Can you tell me about how your reflections and thoughts during these three interviews have helped to change or have not shifted how you consider diverse groups of students’ and their academic potential?

7. Is there any other information you would like me to know about your perceptions of students?

Concluding Statements:
I appreciate you taking time to meet with me throughout this study. The reflections you shared throughout this process were valuable to researching individual teachers’ perceptions of their Students of Color and poor students. I enjoyed learning more about your thoughts and experiences in your school and with your students. I will be listening to the audiotapes and typing up a transcription of this interview that will contribute to this research study. As I consider your responses and reflect on this interview, I may have some further questions for clarification to make sure I understand your thoughts and experiences correctly. If this is the
case, may I contact you to speak with you further to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations? Do you have any questions for me at this time? Should you find you have questions for me, please feel free to contact me. Thank you again for your time and your valuable contributions to this study.