Teacher’s Transformative Learning Experiences in a Cultural Proficiency Professional Development Program

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Abstract

Although scholarship and research have demonstrated that achievement disparities continue to be a major area of concern in public schools, an inadequate amount of research has examined how culturally responsive professional development can impact teachers’ awareness of their implicit bias and a deficit perspective of disenfranchised students. Nor is there sufficient research that examines how this type of transformative learning is associated with teaching for equity, diversity, and social justice. This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) explored the transformative learning experiences of teachers that participated in a cultural proficiency professional development (CPPD) program and examined how these experiences impacted teachers’ implicit bias, previously unquestioned assumptions and belief systems. The study provides an asset-based solution to the achievement disparities that exist between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian Counterparts in public schools. Results indicated that exposing teachers to culturally relevant professional development facilitates transformative learning. Teachers in this study demonstrated that their experiences in a CPPD program shifted their belief systems and transformed their practices both in and outside of the classroom. After discussing the findings, implications for practice, theory, and research are offered.

*Keywords:* Culturally relevant professional development; teacher belief systems, transformative learning, deficit paradigms; opportunity gaps
Dedication

This study is dedicated to the three humans that motivated me to continue to work hard when I had nothing else to give, to have confidence in myself, and to push through when I didn’t think I had it in me to finish. I did this for you, and because of you:

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And

Joaquín Esteban Donnelly

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Chapter 1: Problem of Practice

Problem Statement

While the families of affluent African American, Latino, and White students in suburban schools share similar socioeconomic realities, their school experiences are drastically varied. Ford (2014) argues that, regardless of the social, economic similarities, African American students continue to be marginalized by the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities in public schools. She argues that “inadequate resources and opportunities fuel the myriad of educational social, and economic disparities, which become a vicious cycle in which too many African American and Hispanic students are denied access to school programs” (p. 143) that are essential for their academic success. Researchers like Ford (2012), Diamond (2006), and Ladson-Billings (2007), add that African American and Latino students are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, Honors level, and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. This underrepresentation serves as a vehicle for promoting educational and social inequalities not only in the form of de facto segregation but also in the form of achievement disparities (Ford, 2014, p. 146). Evaluating these disparities from a critical standpoint leads to the understanding that inequities continue to plague both urban and suburban schools because power and privilege are at play. Ladson-Billings (2007; 1998) argues that academic opportunities and inequities are accepted and normalized in public schools because they operate within the dominant structure of White privilege. This value system is one that infects every aspect of our society, and it is so prevalent that it is invisible to those that adhere to the dominant normative view of our society (Bell, 2008). Also, most teachers, whether they teach in urban or suburban settings, have little personal experience unpacking and understanding their privilege (Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Anders Bryan, & Noblit, 2005).
In general, teachers in public schools come from a relatively privileged mono-cultural background and have little to no knowledge of how their student's' different outcomes in school relate to our socially and racially stratified society (King, 1991, p. 133). Unfortunately, the teachers that service African American and Latino students in public schools are among those that perpetuate the power structure. Alarmingly, without “pedagogy and counter-knowledge that challenge [teacher’s] internalized ideologies and subjective identities” (King, 1991, p. 134), these educators will not be able to experience the necessary perspective shift and transformation it takes to effectively educate all students in their public school classrooms. Researchers (Mezirow, 2000; King, 2004; Hoggan, Mälkki & Finnegan, 2016; Harris, Lowery-Moore & Farrow, 2008; Brown, 2005) agree that to experience transformative change, people must be given the opportunity to tap into their perspectives to facilitate an understanding of how their life experience, race, and social status, shape the way they make and understand the world around them. Taking part in a transformative experience that shifts belief systems and incites self-awareness can impact the way teachers treat, interact with, and teach not only African American and Latino students, but all students that exist outside of the dominant power structure.

Moreover, the achievement debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), the resource gap (Nieto, 2010), or the opportunity gap (Gorski, 2010) is further compounded by the teacher gap or the scarcity of teachers of color in public schools. Historically, Black and Latino teachers have been drawn to teach students that share their cultural and linguistic experiences. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002) and Irvine (2010), these commonalities help teachers better connect to the students that they teach. They report that teachers of color are more likely than White teachers to prepare Black and Latino students with a holistic approach. In other words, they teach with the student’s social and cultural realities at the forefront of their instruction (Diamond, 2006; Irvine 2000;
Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Unfortunately, in today’s public schools there is a growing disparity between the race of the students and the race of the teachers that teach and service them. According to Warren-Grice (2017), the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students in suburban schools continues to rise, while the population of teachers of color remains stagnant (p. 2). Thus, the education of an increasingly diverse suburban student population lies in the hands of a predominantly White teacher workforce.

Consequently, the cultural incongruence between the teaching force and the students of color in suburban schools often results in the cultural disconnect between the White teacher and her students. Irvine (2003) observes that African American and Latino students have a different set of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and social norms than most of their teachers. She argues that “when teachers and students bring varying, and often conflicting, cultural experiences to the classroom, there is a possibility of cultural discontinuity” (p. 7) or hidden assumptions that can cause miscommunication and confrontation between the student and the teacher. These hidden assumptions and practices can lead to “hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem; and eventually school failure” (p. 7) for African American and Latino students. Hence, although many people assume that all students are excelling in high performing suburban schools, research shows that the contrary is the reality for African American and Latino students. Like their urban counterparts, suburban schools are also failing to provide a just and equitable education to their students of color. Suburban schools are not only failing African American and Latino students academically, research shows that there is also a prevalence of racial separation and inequality. Diamond (2006) corroborates this point when he argues that, while many students in high performing schools have the same funding and resources available to them, they
often navigate completely different educational terrains. A terrain that denies African American and Latino students the same access to the resources as their White counterparts (p. 495).

To compound the problem, teacher preparation programs struggle to “effectively arm teacher candidates with the transformative pedagogies to benefit the educational outcomes of students who have been disenfranchised across racial, economic, and linguistic lines” (Allen & Hancock, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2010). This lack of preparation of pre-service teachers makes it imperative that school districts take the initiative to help teachers adequately learn how to disrupt deficit thinking, or understand the socio-historical context in which they teach, and their students live and learn (Darling-Hammond, 2010). García and Guerra (2004) agree with Darling-Hammond (2010) and explain that because educators do not include themselves as part of the problem, they fail to look for solutions within their educational context (p. 151). García and Guerra (2004) contend that high-quality professional development that intentionally focuses on transformative learning is the key to disrupting deficit thinking and discriminatory educational practices in public schools.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to understand the transformative learning experiences of teachers who have participated in a culturally proficient or culturally relevant training program in a high performing school district. The teacher’s transformative learning will be defined as a perspective shift or a shift in belief systems. Knowledge generated in the study is expected to inform school districts, as well as policymakers, about the importance of the transformative learning experiences that help teachers understand how deficit paradigms, privilege, and power impact the achievement of African American and Latino students in high performing school districts.
According to Diamond (2016), three principal disadvantages contribute to “racial achievement disparities generally, and particularly within suburban contexts” (p. 496). He states that students of color are disadvantaged: “(a) structurally by having limited access to valued resources outside of schools; (b) institutionally by being positioned systematically in the least advantaged locations for learning inside schools; and (c) ideologically by having their intellectual capacity questioned and their cultural styles devalued both within schools and in the broader social discourse” (p. 496). To combat these disadvantages, researchers (Ladson-Billings 1995; Nieto, 2015; Irvine, 2003, Diamond, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010 and Gay, 2010) suggest that schools must shift their focus from a one-size-fits-all curriculum to a culturally responsive curriculum that is inclusive or one that acknowledges a system that is rooted in oppression. Being aware of this power structure, and making a conscious effort to debunk it, discourages the marginalization of African American and Latino students and makes culturally relevant pedagogy and educational equity attainable. Giroux (1994) adds that to transform a low-expectation, deficit culture, teachers must be trained to develop curriculum that connects with the students that they service. He adds that for curriculum to be meaningful it should relate to the culture, traditions and the communities of the students (p. 44). Unfortunately, the vast majority of teachers in public schools are not equipped with the tools to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy or curriculum. There is a cultural disconnect that inhibits teachers from viewing their students’ strengths rather than their perceived weaknesses (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2006; 2009). According to Delpit and Dowdy (2008), “when students’ interests are addressed in school, they are more likely to connect with the school, with the teacher, with the academic knowledge, and with the school’s language form” (p. 45). In high performing suburban schools, where there are little to no teachers of color,
it is essential to train teachers to reject the deficit-based ideology that negatively impacts culturally diverse students (Howard, 2003, p. 197). Gay (2010) argues that, for deficit-thinking and the disempowerment of students of color to be overcome, “classroom teachers and other educators need to understand that achievement, or lack thereof, is an experience or an accomplishment. It is not the totality of a student’s own identity or the essence of his or her human worth” (p. 1).

The research suggests that transformative learning experiences and culturally relevant experiences that promote social action and advocacy in teachers are needed (García & Guerra, 2004; Magro, 2015; Cranton & King, 2003). According to García and Guerra (2004), teachers who participate in culturally proficient or culturally relevant professional development training “demonstrated increased awareness of culture in educational settings, were able to question and often reject their previously held negative views, and were more likely to recognize their role in student learning and success” (p. 164). It is important to continue to research the previously mentioned outcomes because this shift in paradigm or thinking is a “significant precondition for the successful implementation of systemic change” (García & Guerra, 2004, p. 165). Without such research, “African American students [will continue to] lag behind grade-level competence in core subject areas such as reading, math, science, and social studies” (Howard, 2003, p. 196) and be “labeled at-risk, in-educable, or in need of special education or remedial services” (p. 196). These inequities impact students far beyond the classroom. Diamond (2006) found that these disparities impact the rest of a student’s educational career and eventual success in society. Studies such as this one will aid in debunking a societal ideology that Freire (1970) says promotes the belief that students of color are the “pathology of a healthy society and that the oppressed are incompetent and lazy” (p. 74). To deconstruct this belief system, teachers must
understand that “schooling, including their own miseducation, contributes to unequal educational outcomes that reinforce societal inequity and oppression” (King, 1991). In other words, transformative learning will broaden their knowledge of how society works. What’s more, understanding how transformative learning helps educators come out of dysconscious racism or “the limited and distorted understanding about inequities and cultural diversity – understandings that make it difficult for them to act in favor of truly equitable education” (King, 1991, p. 134), will hopefully discourage the over-criminalization of students of color in public schools.

Traditionally, schools have ignored the impact of historical inequities and have put the onus of blame for our societal ills on the victim or the disenfranchised. This ignorance has led to the over-criminalization and excessive disciplining of students of color, a pattern that feeds students of color into the prison system. Scully (2016) makes the argument that:

Thirty-eight percent of the youth in this country are youths of color; yet, they represent nearly seventy percent of those who are confined. African American youth, in particular, account for thirty percent nationwide of all juvenile arrests after being stopped, even though they constitute only seventeen percent of the juvenile population. Moreover, once prosecuted, Black youth are nine times more likely than White youth to receive an adult prison sentence. (p. 961)

These practices drastically impact our staggering incarceration rates, the massive funding allotted to prisons, and the penalties imparted to the accused (Scully, 2016, Cramer, Gonzalez & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014, Welch & Payne, 2010).

They incapacitate African American and Latino students from eventually participating in civil society, and eliminate their future contributions to our economy. Understanding how teachers experience a perspective shift and transformative learning can offset the dismal reality
of African American and Latino students in public schools and our society. Consequently, Irvine (2003) argues that “teachers’ beliefs about their teaching and their ability to influence the achievement of their students are critically important” (p. 11). She posits that, if we are to truly impact the grim academic reality of students of color in public schools, “teachers have to be perceived as part of the solution for, not the problem with” education (p. 15). Teachers that understand their students, care for their students, laugh with their students, respect their students, and treat them as individuals have students who are comfortable, trusting, and successful in school (Irvine, 2003, Ladson-Billings, 2009).

**Deficiencies In Evidence**

In 2007, the National Center for Educational and Regional Assistance conducted an in-depth review of the research and evidence about teacher professional development programs and their effect on student achievement. The program reviewed evidence from more than 1,300 studies that potentially addressed the impact of teacher development on student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007). The review found few studies that met the “What Works Clearing-House” (WWC) evidence standards. The WWC standards are used to guide the review of studies with acceptable outcomes. The review disclosed that, of the studies examined, those that reported more than 14 hours of professional development for teachers “showed a positive and significant effect on student achievement” (Yoon et al., 2007). Although the review reported that significant hours of professional development for teachers positively impacts student academic outcomes, none of the studies reviewed focused on professional development that promoted transformative learning nor did they focus on the experience of the teachers in professional development programs. The data that most of the studies garnered measured teacher content knowledge,
teacher attitudes, and student outcomes. Very few studies discussed how teachers’ perspectives and beliefs impact student academic achievement.

My investigation into the research found similar results to the review mentioned above; however, I was able to find a few articles that focused on transformative learning experienced in professional development for educators. I discovered ten articles that discussed transformative learning and professional development programs in different capacities. The studies covered topics ranging from the fostering of transformative learning in an online English as a Second Language (ESL) program (Forte & Blouin, 2016) to measuring the importance of transformative learning in a business school (Brock, 2010). Two studies centered around ESL teachers in a K-12 program (Forte & Blouin, 2016). However, only two of the studies in my investigation were centered around culturally proficient or culturally relevant professional development training and transformative learning. Magro (2015) examines how transformative learning can create paths for social justice in education or for “personal, social, and global change” (p. 109). Brown (2005), on the other hand, explores strategies that could be implemented by higher education institutions to “help preservice leaders to understand, critically analyze, and grow in their ability to challenge various forms of social oppression including racism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, and classism” (p. 155). Nevertheless, although I found studies that addressed transformative professional development, social justice, and perspective shifts, none of the studies focused on the teacher perceptions of these experiences. There is a clear scarcity of research in the area of teachers’ experiences participating in transformative learning through professional development programs. To expand the field and enrich the professional development opportunities for teachers, we must continue to research how teachers develop new
frames of reference and how they experience significant shifts in their beliefs, values, and actions (Magro, 2015).

More studies are needed that explore how perspective shifts in teachers could enhance educational opportunities for students of color in suburban contexts. The lack of research calls for studies to be done exploring how training teachers to engage in transformative learning would challenge teachers to question “stereotypes, overcome prejudice, and develop relationships with different kinds of [students]” (Goodman, 2011). “Because transformative learning is an experience that takes place internally, it is only through the examination of individuals’ interpretations of their learning [that the presence of] transformative learning can be determined” (Forte & Blouin, 2016). The hope is that the more studies that are done about culturally relevant transformative learning, the more we can understand how teachers experience cognitive dissonance between their beliefs and their assumptions (García & Guerra, 2004, p. 164). This shift would aid teachers in becoming change agents and help them swing the pendulum toward educational equity in public schools.

**Significance and Context**

As a teacher, I understand the unshakable conviction it takes to increase the academic access and success of African American and Latino students. I have not only witnessed the inequities and lack of access many of my students endure but I have also worked to shed light on these practices to provide my students with the opportunities they deserve. Providing a counter-narrative to the overwhelming negative narrative about African American and Latino students and their families has been a big part of my life’s work. I have tried to lend others the lens through which I see my students. I feel that sharing my lens and helping others shift their perspectives about African American and Latino students is where the power in teaching lies.
Understanding how teachers experience perspective change and how that perspective change can impact the educational access of African American and Latino students is the impetus for my research and my desire to influence systemic change in public schools. In continuation, I will discuss the need for perspective transformation in teachers who teach students of color in high performing school districts.

It is no secret that, for diverse students in public schools, school is neither nurturing nor a place for advancement. Gay (2003) describes public schools as a place of “daymares” for students of color. In fact, many researchers argue that public school settings not only perpetuate educational inequities, they also create the academic problems for students of color. Rocque and Paternoster (2011) posit that “school disengagement and the academic problems of young blacks could be due to the feelings of racial hostility or disparate treatment by teachers, particularly disciplinary treatment” (p. 635). Students of color in public schools do not feel understood, included, or valuable. Research suggests that African American and Latino students are the most disciplined group of students in public schools. Rocque and Paternoster (2010) further state that “stereotype[s] by teachers that black students are academically deficient and hostile to the teachers’ goals could easily lead teachers to see black students as ‘troublemakers’ or menaces” (p. 636). Furthermore, as mentioned previously, this type of criminalization of students of color and their consequent disengagement from school makes it “difficult for black youth to secure legitimate employment, making a life of crime more attractive or more convenient—what we call the school-to-jail link” (Howard, 2003, p. 196).

In the urban schools in which I taught for most of my career, I worked to bring awareness to the discriminatory tracking practices. My students of color were, for the most part, placed in the lowest level tracks and often had no access to Advanced Placement (AP) classes or Honors
level classes. Even if the students displayed academic excellence in the lower level tracks, they were often kept on the same track because it is where they had always been placed. Perhaps the most disturbing realization I had while working to remediate the problem was that many of the administrators and guidance staff were not aware that a lack of access to educational opportunities existed for students of color in our schools. The reality of the aforementioned is also played out every day in the urban sector of the high performing school district where I presently work. I work for a prestigious school district in the state where I reside. In fact, the medium-sized school district is home to several “Blue-Ribbon” schools. The district consistently outperforms many of the surrounding districts. However, the schools located in the urban center of the district are not performing as well as their counterparts in the rest of the district. A closer look at the demographic and achievement data of the schools in the town shows that there is a considerable gap in the achievement of African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts. Because the schools in the town exist under the umbrella of a much larger and academically successful district, the underachievement of the schools in the town, in comparison to the other schools in the district, has been masked under the blanket of the district’s overall academic success.

Although the schools in the town outscores their urban counterparts in the nearby metropolitan area, they underperform their peers within the district. I will use the scores from a statewide science assessment to corroborate this point. In 2016, 65% of the students at my middle school—a school that has an African American student population of 50.2%—scored proficient level, 1.6% of the students scored advanced, and 35.5% scored basic. In comparison, 80.7% of the students at another middle school—a school outside of the urban center but within the district—scored proficient, 8.4% of the students scored advanced, and 16.8% scored basic.
These extreme disparities are troubling and are an indicator that our public school system is failing to prepare Black and Latino students to perform at the level of their White and Asian counterparts. The 2018 exam results of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) demonstrated similar results. On that assessment, only 16% of African American students met the PARCC standards in math, and only 28% met the standards in English Language Arts. In comparison, 52% of their Asian counterparts and 58% of their White counterparts met the standards in math, and 71% of their Asian and White counterparts met the standards in the English Language Arts assessment.

Researchers like Gorski (2010) suggest that disparities, such as those above, happen because there is a deficit paradigm at play. When deficit paradigm is at play, the belief is that inequalities don’t result from “unjust social conditions such as systemic racism or economic injustice, but from intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral deficiencies assumed to be inherent in disenfranchised individuals and communities” (Gorski, 2010, p. 10). For example, Nieto (2015), argues that in much of the literature published about the achievement gap, the deficit paradigm is used as a lens by which to understand the disparities between White students and students of color. She argues that there is a “widespread assumption that students fail to learn primarily because they are unmotivated, their gene pool is inferior, their families do not care, or the cultural values of their particular ethnic group are not oriented toward education” (p. 50). These assumptions are not only motivated by deficit paradigm but also an ideology of power, an ideology that blames the victim for its woes. The mere culture and ethnic identity of African American and Latino students place them “at risk” in public schools without taking into account their talents and individual abilities (Nieto, 2015).
To combat the deficit paradigm in the urban schools within the county, the school system has implemented a cultural proficiency training program that trains teachers interested in profoundly understanding their perspective and positionality and how these impact the way they teach. There are several ways to enter the program. You can sign up to engage in the program individually, engage in the program as a school cohort, or be invited to participate by a colleague or administrator. The purpose of the program is to engage teachers in activities that will guide them through the journey of becoming culturally proficient. The Cultural Proficiency Professional Development (CPPD) program works with the Cultural Proficiency Continuum by Cross (1989) to define the stages of proficiency. The continuum is a six-stage continuum and teacher participants start at different places along the continuum. The stages are: Cultural Destructiveness; Cultural Incapacity; Cultural Blindness; Cultural Pre-Competence; and Cultural Proficiency. The goal of the program is to transition teachers from cultural destructiveness, incapacity, and blindness to pre-competence, competence, and proficiency in order to apply and institutionalize the practices to better serve diverse students, their families, and their communities.

I have participated in two levels of the CPPD program and have served as the cultural proficiency liaison for one of the county’s urban schools. In this role, I lead professional development workshops that focused on helping teachers become aware of how their life’s experiences and personal world-view impact how they perceive the students that they teach. Although the culturally proficiency professional learning began to shift our school cultural norms, some teachers did not receive the training favorably. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that addressing issues of cultural proficiency and culturally responsive teaching can prove to be overwhelming. She claims that even if teachers have the resources and training, some teachers
lack the cultural understanding of students and “…reject information regarding social inequity” (p. 477) entirely. Therefore, although our school and the district have made a drastic push to train teachers to be culturally proficient, it is a voluntary training. Unfortunately, based upon direct feedback and conversations I have had with my colleagues, it is evident that not all teachers or educators understand the powerful impact the training can have on the achievement of African American and Latino students in the district.

To better prepare and encourage their teachers to participate in the CPPD program, some of the academic leaders in the county also attend the cultural proficiency training. According to Young and Laible (2000) “to impact change and eliminate the achievement gap, all school leaders (particularly those servicing African American and Latino students) must have access to the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to the needs of students of color” (p. 391). The report titled The Evaluation of the Cultural Proficiency Program (2010), suggests that principals and district leaders engaged in cultural proficiency training with the district have less discipline disproportionality in their schools. The principals that engaged in the CPPD program were also among the first to implement alternative behavioral programs such as Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS), Restorative Circles, and Student Voice in their schools.

This study adds to the literature about the importance of having teachers unpack their belief systems and assumptions and engage in critical self-reflection. Additionally, the study adds to the literature about how teachers become critically self-aware and how they make meaning of their new frames of reference after engaging in culturally proficient professional development. Successful teachers of culturally and economically diverse students are aware of the social construction of their identities…and what [their] identities represent in the larger context of society” (Maye & Day, 2012, p. 20). According to King (2009), facilitating
transformative experiences allows teachers to understand their assumptions and beliefs and apply their new knowledge to restructure their reality. She argues that learners who engage in transformative learning “experience how new ideas and information can impact and ‘unbalance’ their beliefs, values, and ways of understanding: from their vantage point, the learner’s perspectives of themselves and their changing world” (p. 5). By exploring patterns and trends, like those mentioned above, this study has iterated how the transformative learning promoted by the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development (CCPD) program in this school district is essential to transforming negative assumptions and beliefs about the African American and Latino students in the district. This type of perspective shift can play a role in closing the academic disparities between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts, not only in this district but high performing school districts across the nation.

**Positionality**

The four-year journey of doctoral studies has been immensely transformative for me. In this program, I have learned how impactful my societal roles are to the way I perceive the world around me. I have also learned that I am not just a teacher. I am an Afro-Latina, middle-class, educated, woman and mother. I am a woman who has lived in poverty, been a second language learner, and experienced educational barriers. My life’s journey and the intersectionality of my race, gender, and ethnicity have shaped my identity as “other” or a person who exists outside of the power structure within American social norms. However, my educational experience has inevitably led to my acculturation or assimilation to American cultural norms. Unfortunately, I feel that without assimilation, entrance and/or acceptance into the privileged group in society would not have been possible. As an Afro-Latina in a racialized society, I was indoctrinated into the belief that my cultural background, native language, Spanish accent, my natural hair, and
lifestyle were not good enough to be privileged. When I started to work on my Spanish accent, the world let me know how impressive it was that I spoke English so well. My hair was complemented only when I spent hours in the salon blowing out the curl in it, and as I continue to engage in higher education, I am told that I am a great example for Latinos. Only now that I have engaged in thinking critically about my journey and as an Afro-Latina scholar, do I understand that the many compliments I have received by my White peers were actually microaggressions. They were an acknowledgment that I was becoming more of an accepted and embraced member of the American social norm because I was removing the qualities that made me Afro-Latina. This acknowledgment has been transformative. I understand that my assimilation and acculturation have allowed me to skirt the line between being an “other” and being a part of the dominant power structure of society. The experience of unpacking my assimilation has allowed me to be keenly aware of the internalization of the cultural norms that society has placed upon me. I am no longer blind. I see and understand the impact of my transformation. In continuation, I will discuss how my life’s experiences have shaped the woman, educator, and researcher that I am today.

**Fitting In.** I am the oldest of four daughters in an immigrant family and the first to go to college and beyond. I come from a long line of educators. In fact, there are streets and schools still named after my great-grandfather, a revered educator and activist, in the Dominican Republic (DR). I was born in the United States and raised partly in the DR. Although I spent most of my early childhood in the DR, I consider myself as American as I am Dominican. I am wholly bilingual and bicultural, and I cannot separate one from the other; I cannot exist as an American without being a Dominican and vice versa. My bilingualism and biculturalism have made me sensitive to the plight of students of color. Education was the door to the American
Dream for my sisters and me. It was our only way to gain access to a different socioeconomic realm and social capital. This access, however, came at a price. I felt that to be successful in school, I had to erase or mute the part of me that made me different. I worked on eliminating my accent and behaved in a way that I thought would be accepted by my teachers and my classmates. The more “standard” I became, the better I did in school and the more socially accepted I was by my peers. In college, I began to find myself again by surrounding myself with other students like myself. I felt liberated to be Black, to be smart, to be Latina, to be me. My identity as an Afro-Latina was born and nurtured during my college years and eventually shelved again when I began to work after college. My bilingualism and biculturalism became secondary to getting hired in corporate America and making money. I did not start to explore my identity again until I left the private sector to teach. Once in the classroom, I realized that I wanted to work with students who were like me. I wanted to help give them a voice. I have worked in urban districts giving voice to, providing a counter-narrative for, and fighting for fair practices for students of color ever since.

**Fight for Equity.** My drive to fight for equity further intensified after becoming a mother as I saw all of my students through the lens of a mother. After becoming a mother, I developed a broad sense of duty to my students. I felt that if I gave up on them or did not fight for them, I would, in essence, be giving up on my children. This sense of responsibility was imparted to me by my mother. In fact, my identity as a woman, mother, and teacher has been profoundly shaped by witnessing my mother’s social justice advocacy throughout my life. When I was four years old, I attended my first human rights rally in the DR with my Afro-wearing Dominican mom. The rally was in protest of the working conditions of Haitian women in sugar cane fields. To put the aforementioned in perspective, the year was 1978 and, at the time, neither
wearing an Afro nor voicing pro-Haitian sentiment was acceptable comportment for a Dominican woman living in the DR. This experience, along with many others my mother exposed me to, helped shape my definition for social justice and my drive and passion for social advocacy.

My passion for social advocacy has been further strengthened as I have reflected on my life’s journey and the intersectionality of my race, gender, and ethnicity in this doctoral program. This program has been transformative for me as I have become aware of my social lens. After reading and learning about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), I became aware that I adhere to a critical way of thinking about race and social equity. Thus, consistent with CRT and LatCrit philosophy, I believe that my role as a scholar is “to explore and deconstruct race-neutral or color-blind ideologies within historical and cultural contexts to challenge racial and/or ethnic subordination” (Vélez et al., 2008). I realize that this critical approach to social justice frames not only how I see the issues surrounding equity, but also how I act upon those issues.

**Critical Lens.** It is essential to have an awareness of my critical lens because this study required that I interact and interview teachers of different demographic positioning (Briscoe, 2005) than my own. It was especially important that, during the teacher interviews and the evaluation of data, I considered that I could not separate my life and life’s experiences from the research I conducted. My critical way of thinking could have skewed my judgment of those who do not adhere to the same philosophy. It was imperative that I proceeded cautiously and with awareness of this bias. I approached this study with the understanding that the teachers participating in the study did not necessarily have the same level of acceptance or knowledge of issues regarding race that I do. I could not assume that the participants would relate to the life
experiences or the plight of students in their classrooms. I had to value their life experiences, be open to understanding their perspectives, and consider their perspectives as worthy as mine.

In conclusion, previous to my endeavor as a scholar, I was aware of other’s biases and misuses of power. However, I had never given much thought or even credence to the possibilities that I may harbor prejudices of my own. Nor did I understand that many of my behaviors used to adhere to a normative or dominant view of society. I often asked myself, “if I overcame adversity to be successful, why can’t my peers, students, and family with the same circumstances do the same?” Although I had experienced racism, I had not profoundly analyzed the historical impact of racism and oppression on society as a whole. I did not understand how the historical factors shape the social, economic, and educational inequities of people of color in the United States. It was not until I began to investigate the institutional structures in public education with a critical eye that I became keenly aware of the injustices that have gone on and continue to go for students of color in these settings. Continually identifying and communicating my biases and perspectives as a researcher was essential in laying the groundwork for the context of this study. Without this groundwork, there was a higher risk of misinterpretation and misconception of the data by both the researcher and the reader.

Research Question

What are the transformative learning experiences of teachers who have participated in a cultural proficiency training program?

Theory: Transformative Learning Theory

This study explored how teachers perceive their experiences of transformative learning in a cultural proficiency professional development (CPPD) program. According to Taylor (2007), “transformative learning is effective at capturing the meaning-making process of adult
learners, particularly the learning process of paradigm shifts” (p. 174). The teachers participating in this study have taken part in a CPPD program. This adult training program strives to create transformative learning opportunities for its participants. The learners in the program can experience “how new ideas and information can impact and ‘unbalance’ their beliefs, values, and ways of understanding: from their vantage point, the learner’s perspectives of themselves and their changing world” (King, 2009, p. 5).

This study used transformative learning theory as a tool or a roadmap for understanding such experiences and transformations. In this study, it was also important to consider the contextual framework of the CPPD program when exploring the experiences of the teachers in the program. The CPPD program aligns its instruction to the five principles of cultural proficiency, which are that: culture is a predominant force in people’s lives; the dominant culture serves people in varying degrees; people have both personal identities and group identities; diversity within cultures is vast and significant; and each group has unique cultural values and needs (Lindsey, Roberts & CampbellJones, 2005, p. 20).

The guiding principle of the program is to guide teachers toward cultural proficiency. The program strives to “open up opportunities to build culturally proficient and functionally diverse educational communities in which people interact with one another in respectful and culturally responsive ways” (Lindsey, Roberts & CampbellJones, p. 21). The definition of cultural proficiency used throughout the CPPD program is that Cultural Proficiency is “honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups” (Lindsey et al., 2005). Furthermore, the program promotes the exploration of power structures, as well as changes in the participants’ values, beliefs, and attitudes. There are also five essential elements to transforming belief
systems that govern the CPPD program: Assessing one’s own cultural knowledge; valuing diversity; dealing with conflict; adapting to diversity; and integrating cultural knowledge.

According to Mezirow, the aforementioned is the perfect environment for transformative learning to occur. Mezirow (2000) states that adult education programs that create protected learning environments in which the condition of social democracy is explored, foster transformative learning opportunities (p. 31). Therefore, in this study, the principles of cultural proficiency served as the contextual framework that established the type of learning fostered by the program, and transformative learning theory is the theoretical framework that provided the blueprint for understanding how meaning-making and transformation occurred with the participants in the program. Mezirow’s transformative learning theory provided meaning to the shift in the teacher’s perspectives, interpretations, and beliefs that were surfaced as a result of their participation in the CPPD program. In continuation, I will discuss the tenets of transformative learning theory and seminal authors in the field.

Transformative learning is defined “as the process by which we alter problematic frames of reference, which include habits of mind, meaning perspectives, assumptions, and expectations” (Maise, 2017, p. 198). Understanding how teachers perceive their own transformative learning experiences and how these experiences align with the stages of transformative learning theory shed light on how the learning occurring in the CPPD program altered [teacher] perspectives, interpretations, and their responses.

Transformative learning, or transformation theory, is synonymous with Jack Mezirow. Mezirow’s transformation theory is an adult learning theory that details the personal transformation of adult learners. It “explains the process of using our own experiences, rather than the values we have uncritically assimilated from others, to make sense of the world around
us” (Casebeer & Mann, 2017, p. 233). Mezirow (2000) posits that adult learners who experience transformative learning generally pass through ten phases: a disorienting dilemma; self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame; a critical assessment of assumptions; recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation is shared; exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning a course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan; provisionally trying new roles; building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (p. 22).

Transformative learning theory was particularly relevant for this study because of its focus on how adult learners can change beliefs by reflecting on prior interpretations to construct new frameworks for future action (Casebeer & Mann, 2017, p. 234). It explained how adults made meaning of their life experiences, and how this meaning-making brought about impactful changes in their perspective. Brock (2010) argues that Mezirow’s ten stages of transformative learning can be categorized into four levels: an elaboration of existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming a point of view, and transforming what Mezirow “calls habits of mind” (p. 124). Furthermore, Mezirow (2000) argues that transformative learning may occur through “objective or subjective reframing” (p. 23). He defines objective reframing as the “critical reflection on the assumptions of others encountered in a narrative or task-oriented problem solving” (p. 23). Mezirow (2000) tells us that subjective reframing involves:

…self-reflection of one’s assumptions about: a narrative or applying reflective insight from someone else’s narrative to one’s own experience; a system, such as, economic, cultural, political, educational or communal; an organization or workplace; feelings and
interpersonal relationships; and the ways one learns, including one’s own frames of reference. (p. 23)

There are two significant elements in Mezirow’s transformative learning theory: critical self-reflection on assumptions and critical discourse. Both of these elements impacts the way the learner makes meaning. Through transformative learning, the learner realizes a potential for becoming more liberated and socially responsible by making informed choices (Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow’s transformative learning theory is heavily influenced by the work of three prominent theories: Kuhn’s paradigm, Freire’s conscientization, and Habermas’ domains of learning (Kitchenham, 2010 & Taylor, 2007). Taylor (2007) argues that “the key ideas of these theorists inform Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and the significant concepts of disorienting dilemma, meaning schemes, meaning perspectives, perspective transformation, frame of reference, levels of learning processes, habits of mind and critical self-reflection” (p. 106). Mezirow combined many elements from these theorists to develop his transformative learning theory. He used Habermas’ habits of mind or meaning perspectives to give context to perspective shifts, Kuhn’s paradigms to understand meaning schemes and how new meaning is created, and Freire’s conscientization to understand how one learns to develop critical awareness.

Mezirow’s transformative learning theory has evolved over the past 20 years, with various authors having contributed to the evolution. Although the critical tenets of the theory remain mostly intact, some researchers have questioned their validity and have expanded on them over time. In Taylor’s (2007) review of the literature, he states that authors like Dirkx (2000) and Boyd & Meyers (1998) believe that Mezirow’s version of the theory puts too much emphasis on rationality. These authors argue that transformative learning is a more intuitive, creative, and holistic approach. Combining the definition of both schools of thought,
Transformative learning implies both “an inner and outer dimension, a shift in consciousness to embrace an extended sense of relationality…an experience of self, much more full in transaction with others and with the environment, a participatory self or participatory mind” (Sterling, 2010). In 1991, Mezirow updated his transformative learning theory to include an additional phase, “renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 118), between the initial phases eight and nine. This new phase iterates the importance of critical self-reflection. He outlines the constructivist views that form the basis of the revised theory, including, “a conviction that meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communication” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 118). The 1991 revised theory allows for a more in-depth understanding of how the learner transforms. It argues that if a learner does not rationalize his or her point of view without the rooted sentiment that accompanied the original perspective, then awareness or perspective transformation could not occur (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 113).

Transformative learning theory was essential to fully understand how teachers perceived their experiences of transformative learning in the CPPD program. The program is designed to promote awareness of self on its participants. Thus, to explore the transformative learning experienced by the participants in the program, it was essential to understand the way that adults learn and transform frames of reference. Brown (2005) argues that to experience transformative learning, participants need to be given an opportunity to “externalize and investigate power relationships and to uncover hegemonic assumptions” (p. 157) and then make meaning from this experience. The CPPD program, in which the teachers in this study participated, is one that focuses on intentionally fostering transformation on its participants. Thus, given the above, it is
likely that this type of learning will increase the probability of enduring change in the participant’s teaching (Gravett, p. 260).

Furthermore, there “is an inadequate amount of empirical work that has been studied on the relationship between in-service professional learning and teaching for equity, diversity, or social justice” (Kose & Lim, 2010, p. 197). This study adds to scholarship and research about CPPD programs and how they may impact the success of African American and Latino students in high performing school districts. Kose and Lim (2010) posit that, “While research has investigated the relationship between pre-service teacher transformative professional development as well as (external) transformative in-service teacher professional development and teacher beliefs and practices, the relationship between school-level professional learning and transformative beliefs, attitudes, or teaching remains less clear” (p. 197). Finally, since demographic trends suggest that the face of the United States will continue to become increasingly more diverse, it is more important than ever to continue the scholarly effort to explain the relationship between culturally proficient professional development and its impact on teaching students of color in high performing school districts. Education reform requires that educators provide quality and equitable schooling for all of its students. To do so, teachers must develop culturally proficient and equitable dispositions and practices. Understanding how teachers change their beliefs and practices through their experiences with transformative learning is an important step to improving the dismal reality of students of color in public schools.

**Method: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The methodology that is most consistent with the epistemological position of the research question of this study is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or IPA. The goal of IPA is to explore a phenomenon through the experience of how a participant is making sense of an
experience through an interpretative analysis of that experience. Since this study focused on the
experiences of teachers’ transformative change as a result of their participation in a CPPD
program, IPA allowed me to have a personal, more speculative relationship with the data.

IPA allows the researcher room to both understand and construct meaning from the data
collected. According to Smith, Flower and Larkin (2009) “[t]he underlying qualities of the IPA
researcher are: open-mindedness; flexibility; patience; empathy; and the willingness to enter into,
and respond to, the participant’s world.” This study engaged in the complexity of the perspective
of teachers’ experiences and perceptions. IPA makes room for the researcher to evaluate and
engage with the unpredictable nature of people’s experiences. This methodology is essential in
providing this study a rich source of analysis of the transformative learning process of teachers
participating in the CPD program.

**Audience and Stakeholders**

As has already been stated, many factors impact the gaps in how we educate African
American and Latino students. However, it has been established that the privilege, implicit bias,
and deficit thinking of many teachers that teach students of color need to be addressed. The onus
of responsibility is simply not on the students and their families, but on the educational
institutions that promise to teach and serve all students. Traditionally, “school reform efforts stall
or fail because deficit beliefs become a filter that blocks educators’ abilities to examine their
assumptions and to look beyond traditional solutions for real and meaningful change” (García &
Guerra, 2004, p. 151). Some of the stakeholders in the high performing school district, where the
study will be conducted are taking measurable steps to create meaningful change to the academic
achievement of our most disenfranchised students. In an “Educational Leadership” article by
Krownapple, Kosi, and Keeny (2000) the district stated that:
The only way to truly close opportunity gaps, is to uncover and jettison any unearned—and often invisible—advantages the system confers. Unmasking the advantages that the system confers requires meaningful dialogue about experiences within that system from a variety of perspectives. The result is a greater awareness of how we may unwittingly participate in maintaining disparities that we say we want to eliminate. Awareness makes visible the often invisible foundations of our culture, contexts that are historically steeped in traditions of separation and inequality.

This study investigated how the teachers experienced a shift in perspective and belief system as a participant of the CPPD program. Thus, it was essential to establish who the stakeholders were for a study that sheds light on the “… institutional practices that systematically marginalize or pathologize difference” (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 154). In other words, who would benefit from examining the transformative experiences of teachers that participate in a CPPD program? Many stakeholders would benefit from the understanding of how teachers experience a perspective shift. First, the teachers that are unsuccessfully teaching disenfranchised Black and Latino students in high performing school districts may be able to understand some contributing factors as to why their students are not succeeding academically. García and Guerra (2004) found that although most teachers are well-intentioned, caring individuals, they are unaware of “deeper, hidden, or invisible dimensions of culture, which have a significant influence on their own identity, educators’ role definitions, and instructional practices” (p. 154).

As teachers begin to experience and understand their perspective shift toward being more equity-oriented, they can start to serve as change agents for school reform. Along the same lines, school and district leaders looking to positively impact the achievement disparities between African American and Latino students and their White counterparts can significantly benefit
from understanding how teachers change their belief systems and, in turn, change the academic reality of their students of color. Finally, the most critical stakeholders in this study are the disenfranchised students of color in high performing school districts. Nieto (2010) believes that:

Failure to learn does not develop out of thin air; it is scrupulously created through policies, practices, attitudes, and beliefs. In a very concrete sense, the results of educational inequality explain by example what society believes its young people are capable of achieving and what they deserve (p. 53).

Consequently, addressing the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers who teach Black and Latino students in suburban schools would positively impact the educational experience of the students that they teach. Normalizing culturally relevant practices with all teachers that service students of color would begin to put a dent on the educational inequities that African American and Latino students experience. Studies such as this one add to the current dialogue on deficit thinking, and it broadens the examination of deficit thinking to include how teachers deconstruct such ideology. This shift in thinking is a significant precondition for the successful implementation of systemic change (García & Guerra, 2004, p. 165).

In conclusion, this study had to be done because although the achievement gap is a topic that is heavily discussed in academia, few studies focus on the root cause of the problem. As researchers, we must continue to look for solutions that transcend the historical legacies of racism. Failure to address deficit thinking, implicit bias, and the impact of power structures in high performing school districts could result in the further disenfranchisement and academic disengagement of students of color. Our society cannot afford the latter.
**Conclusion/Forward**

The challenges that Black and Latino students face in public schools today place a great urgency on creating educational systems that provide new direction and focus on how to provide an equitable and just education. This introduction provided an overview of the problem of practice and the focus that has led to this study. The central question of the study, sub-questions, and the theoretical framework that guided this study were also identified. The following was a brief overview of the methodology and a discussion of the stakeholders and audience of this study. Finally, in continuation, the next chapter will review the most relevant scholarly literature that surrounds the problem of practice and the theoretical constructs of the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The United States holds closely the ideal that all Americans can succeed so long as they work hard to do so. The assumption is that “one’s social and economic mobility are achieved through individual effort and hard work; regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other social identity, [that] individuals can claim a piece of the American dream by pulling themselves by their bootstraps” (Carter, 2008, p. 466). Unfortunately, the public schools in the United States tell another story. Urban school districts have historically been plagued by the underachievement of African American and Latino students. Talbert-Johnson (2004) argues that achievement disparity is the most critical issue facing American education today. Moreover, as the United States becomes increasingly pluralistic, the achievement disparities are no longer housed within urban districts (Chapman, 2014; Diamond, 2006; Diamond et al., 2007; Gordon, 2012; Levine & Eubanks, 1990; Strayhorn, 2009; Tyler, 2016). Gordon (2012) argues that in recent years, there has been an increasing number of African American and Latino students attending suburban schools. Although the families of these students no longer live in urban districts, disparities between the way African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts are educated in suburban schools are still present. Diamond (2006) corroborates this point when he argues that although Black students in “affluent suburbs often outperform Black students in urban schools and less affluent suburbs, wide gaps in grades, test scores, and course-taking practices exist between Black and White students in these contexts” (Diamond, 2006, p. 495). Gordon (2012) adds that academic disparities persist for African American and Latino students because suburban schools “situate [African American and Latino students] as academically and socially aberrant, regardless of their middle-class suburban status” (Gordon, 2012, p. 4). The argument that African American and Latino students are disenfranchised regardless of their
social status is supported by the achievement discrepancies that exist between African American and Latino students and their White counterparts in suburban communities (Levine & Banks, 1990).

The research acknowledges that the root causes of the perpetuation of academic and opportunity disparities in both urban and suburban settings is multilayered and complex. In continuation, this review will discuss the term achievement gap, analyze why achievement and opportunity disparities continue to be persistent in public schools, and investigate the factors that exacerbate them in “integrated” high performing suburban schools. The subsections of the review will explore how deficit paradigms, such as the practice of tracking, discipline practices, and the teacher belief systems, negatively impact student performance in public schools. Lastly, this review will report on possible strategies and practices that attack the root cause of the opportunity gap and positively impact the academic success of African American and Latino students in urban and suburban public schools.

The Achievement Gap

The preponderance of the research surrounding academic inequities between students in public schools is about the existence and gravity of the achievement gap. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that the achievement gap is one of the most common phrases in today’s education literature (p. 3). A Google search of the term “achievement gap” yields over 70,000 results. It is clear from the literature that the term “achievement gap” has become a topic of interest for many in the field of education. The literature defines the achievement gap as a significant difference in the average test scores between White and non-White students (Pitre, 2014, p. 209). The gap is measured and established by standardized test scores. These test scores are then used to demonstrate a discrepancy between the students on the higher end of the performance scale,
primarily White and Asian students, and students on the lower end of the performance scale, primarily African American and Latino students (Hughes; 2003; Laroque, 2007; Pitre, 2014).

Much of the research attributes the achievement gap to environmental and genetic factors, poverty, lack of parental involvement, student disinterest in school and subject matter, and a cultural disconnect from school (Fritzberg, 1999; Hughes, 2003; Jensen, 2009; Payne, 2005; Swain, 2006). Ruby Payne (1996; 2001; 2005; 2008) has made a living from her books, articles, and professional development workshops that focus on how to help students “overcome” the cultural “pitfalls” of being poor. She posits that “if students from poverty are going to succeed in school, they will need worldview, language, and behavior modifications that move them more in line with the prevailing middle class oriented school culture” (Gorski, 2006a). Jensen (2009), agrees with Payne’s (2005) point of view and adds that the achievement disparities of African American and Latino students is a result of the impact of poverty on students. Jensen (2009) argues that poor students are unsuccessful because they adhere to a “culture of poverty.” He goes as far as to scientifically explain how the brains of children from poverty differ from those that are wealthy. He explains that “even when low-income parents do everything they can for their children, their limited resources put kids at a huge disadvantage. The growing human brain desperately needs coherent, novel, challenging input, or it will scale back its growth trajectory” (p. 37).

This narrative locates the problem of inequity in education within the disenfranchised students and communities. Blame is given to the African American and Latino students, their families, their socioeconomic status, and their culture. The focus is on “fixing” disenfranchised people rather than the conditions that disenfranchise them (Gordon, 2012; Gorski, 2010; Nieto, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Nieto (2010) argues that the popular achievement gap narrative negates the
impact of personal and institutional biases and discrimination and how these are manifested in schools. Irvine (2003) agrees with Nieto’s perspective. Irvine goes on to explain that the popular narrative about achievement disparities between African American students and their White and Asian counterparts not only negate the impact of personal and institutional biases but it also fails to point out or explain why:

African Americans from affluent families still score significantly lower than their White counterparts on standardized measures of achievement. Nor do these studies provide insight into why [African Americans] in desegregated suburban schools score only slightly better than [African Americans] in segregated urban schools. Nor do they explain the finding that the average [African American] child now attends school in a district that spends as much per pupil as the school attended by the average White child. (Irvine, 2003, p. 4).

The continued lack of acknowledgment about the factors that influence the academic success of African American and Latino students, Gorski (2010) argues, is allowed because it is framed in a class-based deficit ideology that dominates the public discourse on the education of low-income people (p. 4). In what follows, an alternative perspective is presented that frames its observations from a critical perspective, a critical discourse that challenges deficit paradigms in education. This alternate perspective redefines the achievement gap rhetoric by giving it sociopolitical context.

**The Counter Narrative**

Several prominent authors in the field of education offer an alternative point of view to the overwhelming achievement gap narrative. They challenge the assumption that African American and Latino students are problematic. Rather, authors such as Ladson-Billings (2007), Nieto
(2010), Gorski (2006), Irvine (2003), Delpit (2008), Hooks (1994), and Yosso (2005), among others, offer a discourse that explores academic disparities from a critical standpoint. A standpoint that reveals that the term “achievement gap” emerged from a deficit paradigm that adheres to the belief that inequalities don’t result from “unjust social conditions such as systemic racism or economic injustice, but from intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral deficiencies assumed to be inherent in disenfranchised individuals and communities” (Gorski, 2010, p. 10). This line of research illuminates how teacher belief systems, race, and racial bias play a role in student achievement and educational opportunities. Some of the authors redefine the achievement gap, Ladson-Billings (achievement debt), Nieto (resource gap), and Gorski (opportunity gap), to reflect the social conditions that impact student achievement in public schools.

These researchers agree that the disparities between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts in public schools are manifested by a resource gap. Nieto (2010) states that schools offer “unequal funding, inadequate or stereotypical depictions of diversity in the curriculum and low expectations of students who embody difference” (p. 51). She goes on to explain that the resource gap is exacerbated in public schools because the existence of racism and other biases is virtually ignored and because they challenge the ideal that advancement and achievement are based on merit, not on social class status or racial privilege (p. 51). This line of research reveals “institutional practices that systemically marginalize and pathologize difference” (García & Guerra, 2004, p. 154) and negate the power structure in our society. Nieto (2010) pushes back on the term “achievement gap” because she argues that the term is a “scapegoat” for student failure. She explains that this line of research does not try to understand the root cause of the problem, but rather promulgates the widespread negative
assumptions of African American and Latino students in public schools.

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2007) challenges the term “achievement gap” on two levels. First, she argues that by using the term “achievement gap” we are suggesting that to close the gap, students who achieve at a high level need to remain stagnant, while those that are not achieving at the same level “catch up.” Secondly, she argues that the term “achievement gap” “makes us think that the problem is merely one of student achievement…that the students are not doing their part” (p. 317). Her concern with the achievement gap rhetoric is that it never considers other gaps such as the wealth gap or the gap in educational funding that low-income schools receive. She defines the achievement gap as an achievement debt and argues that this is a debt that has accumulated as a result of centuries of neglect and the denial of education to entire groups of students (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p 321). Ladson-Billings goes on to explain that the term “achievement debt” reminds us that we have, for large periods of history, excluded groups of people from the political process where they might have a say in democratically determining what education should look like in their communities, and it reminds us that society and educational institutions continue to play a role in the unethical and immoral treatment of our underserved populations (p. 321). Thus, grounded in Gorski’s, Ladson-Billings, and Nieto’s framing as well as my own research and experiences, I will use the term “opportunity gap” to reflect the academic disparities between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts.

The Opportunity Gap in High Performing School Districts

Over the last four decades, suburban schools have experienced dramatic increases in racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity (Diamond, 2006; Tyler & Ayscue, 2016, p. 283). Although it may seem that this increase in diversity represents an opportunity for more integrated
schools, this pattern of change is not reflective of equitable educational practice for all students (Allen, 2003; Chapman, 2014; Sulak, 2014; Tyler & Ayscue, 2016). In fact, researchers agree that rather than promote equity, suburban diversification may actually perpetuate academic inequality (Diamond, 2006; Rumberger and Thomas, 2000; Strayhorn, 2009; Tyler & Ayscue, 2016). The disparity in educational practices and opportunities is evident in the continued and widening gap between the academic success of African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts. (Alson, 2006; Chapman, 2014; Levine & Eubanks, 1990; Pitre, 2014; Strayhorn, 2009). The literature details structural, institutional, and symbolic inequalities that characterize suburban school settings (Diamond, 2006, p. 495). These inequities “can be seen in standardized test scores, grade point averages, graduation rates and college admission data” (Pitre, 2014, p. 209). In addition to the disparities in academic achievement, today’s urban and suburban public schools are places in which African American and Latino students are disproportionately disciplined, tracked in low-level and special education classes (Irvine, 2003), and lack access to highly qualified teachers and helpful resources. Ferguson (2002) posits that racial discrepancies, in high-achieving suburban schools, infiltrate every aspect of student life. Ferguson’s study details racial disparities in many areas of academic life; he documents considerable disproportions in teacher expectations, academic support provided to students, and student grade point average. Gordon’s (2012), study corroborates the latter by highlighting the experiences of African American males in suburban schools. Her findings illustrate that African American students in suburban schools struggle because of racial identity issues, disillusionment with school, disengagement, and low academic performance. Gordon (2012) posits that African Americans students face the aforementioned issues because they have to navigate through a racialized space where they must adhere to the dominant White culture or risk being labeled
delinquent (p. 19). Gordon’s study concludes that for African American families and students, “Suburban life…is a cautionary tale at best because its promises can be muted by the reactions of the dominant group to the presence of newcomers to suburban communities” (p. 23). In other words, to be successful in a suburban school setting, African American and Latino students must perform well academically and successfully navigate through a shifting racial terrain (Diamond, 2006).

According to Diamond (2006), “because race continues to provide structural, institutional, and symbolic advantages to some groups and disadvantages to others regardless of the racial composition of schools” (p. 496), the academic experiences of African American and Latino students are drastically varied from their White counterparts. For example, unlike their White counterparts, African American and Latino students in high performing schools are underrepresented in the gifted and talented programs, Honors level, and advanced placement (AP) classes (Ford, 2012; Diamond, 2006; Irvine, 2003). Ford’s (2014) study about African Americans and Latinos in gifted programs found that their underrepresentation is persistent and pervasive in U.S. public schools (p. 144). The data in her study revealed the tragic reality of de jure segregation in gifted education for both African American and Latino students. Ford goes on to explain that this underrepresentation stifles students from reaching their full potential. In her findings she suggests that the root cause of the exclusion of African American and Latino students from gifted education is prejudice and deficit paradigms (Ford, 2014, p. 150).

Critical researchers agree that inequities, such as the aforementioned, are accepted and normalized in public schools because they exist within a terrain that accepts that the people in the United States have differential access to valued resources based on race (Diamond, 2006; Gorski, 2010; Nunn, 2011; Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007). Yosso (2005) explains that “such deficit
approaches to schooling begin with overgeneralizations about family background and are exacerbated by a limited framework to interpret how individual views about educational success are shaped by personal sociocultural and linguistic experiences and assumptions about appropriate cultural outcomes” (p. 75). The assumption is that schools are functional and serve all students equally and that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Gorski (2010) explains that this train of thought is problematic in public schools because it “manipulates popular consciousness in order to deflect attention from the systemic conditions and sociopolitical context that underlie or exacerbate [those] inequities…” (p. 6). The research clearly establishes that inequity in suburban public school is allowed because of the assumption that schools “help disadvantage students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and social capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). This perspective is troubling because it is laced in the belief that African American and Latino students go to school to be “fixed” and until they are “fixed” they can’t be successful students. The literature exposed several educational practices that adhere to this deficit paradigm and provides a rationale for why they still persist in urban and suburban schools.

Deficit Paradigms

According to Gorski (2011) the deficit perspective perpetuates the idea that difference – particularly difference from ourselves – is deficit. As previously mentioned, the research indicates that there is a “widespread assumption that students fail to learn primarily because they are unmotivated, their gene pool is inferior, their families do not care, or the cultural values of their particular ethnic group are not oriented toward education” (p. 50). Yosso (2005) corroborates this point by explaining that:
Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. These racialized assumptions about Communities of Color most often lead schools to default to the banking method of education critiqued by Paulo Freire (1973). As a result, schooling efforts usually aim to fill up supposedly passive students with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society. (p. 75)

Delpit (1988), situates her discussion about deficit paradigms around the “culture of power” and she cites evidence that this culture has a pervasive presence on all fronts of the educational landscape. She asserts that the “culture of power” is enacted by teacher over student, by publishers who determine the perspectives presented in textbooks to students, by the state that controls testing and funding practices, and by the individuals and groups who determine “another’s intelligence or normalcy” (p. 283). Consequently, because schools prepare students for the workforce and because schools teach students about the type of expectations they should have of themselves, schools that adhere to the culture of power are also determining the kind of jobs that students are prepared for. This phenomenon impacts a student’s future socioeconomic status and eventual power within society (Delpit, 1988). Delpit (1988) suggests that to combat the negative impact of the culture of power, students must be taught:

…the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher’s expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own “expertness” as well; and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must
also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationship they present (p. 296).

Ladson-Billings’ (1997; 1998; 2007) extensive research on deficit paradigms and the miseducation of African Americans in the United States, provides a framework by which to understand how such blatant inequities and unethical practices are rendered invisible in public schools. She argues that a deficit paradigm is possible because racism is “normal” in our society or engrained in the fiber of our social order. As a consequence, inequities in schooling, stereotypes, and policies are accepted and go unquestioned. These factors then, contribute to the demoralization of disenfranchised groups and in turn, “members of the minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14).

The demoralization and “otherizing” of African American and Latino students in public schools reveal why access into Honors, AP classes, and gifted and talented programs is often denied. It sheds light onto why African American and Latino students are overrepresented in special education and remedial courses and it provides a rationale for why educational institutions continue to implement and carry out practices that lock out African American and Latino students from rigorous academic content, engaging academic tasks, and high-quality instruction (Pitre, 2014, p. 213). The work of several researchers explains that the prevalence and normalcy of the deficit paradigm creates racialized spaces or spaces that adhere to preexisting race-based social hierarchies (Ipsa-Landa & Conwell, 2014; Oseguera et al., 2011). In schools, the social hierarchies allow achievement to be racialized because the symbolic meanings attached to race mask structural and institutional inequality…thus, students and teachers turn to racial stereotypes to explain the racial disparities they observe because they lack an alternative
explanatory framework (Oseguera et al., 2011, p. 2). This racialization of achievement facilitates institutional practices that negate African American and Latino students’ access to an equitable education and promotes practices such as tracking and the disproportional disciplining of these students (Diamond, 2006; Ford, 2014; Nelson, 2001; Noguera, 2008). Such practices speak volumes about the perspectives and paradigms employed in school policies. These practices negate the factors that negatively impact the academic access and success of African American and Latino students.

**Tracking**

The low-level tracking or low-ability grouping of African American and Latino students is one of the most evident demonstrations of the deficit paradigm at play in public schools (Irvine 2003; Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2014; Logan et al., 2012; Rubin, 2006). “Ability grouping or tracking is the practice of assigning students to specific academic curriculum based upon perceived ability” (Nelson, 2001, p. 364). Although courts in the 1950s and 1960s, agreed that segregating students into ability groupings relegates students into classrooms where they receive inferior instruction, the practice goes uncontested today based upon the belief that de jure segregation no longer has an effect on the equitable education of African American and Latino students (Boaler, 2005; Borman & Dowling, 2010; Bygren, 2016; Chambers et al., 2009; Cipriano-Walter, 2015; Ford, 2014; Losen, 1999; Londen, 1995). Nelson (2001) argues that schools are believed to be a neutral zone and place of equity and a place where academic opportunity is available to *all* students. He goes on to argue that schools make the assumption that if students are not performing, it is due to the lack of literacy and language development in the home and that the racial disparities are merely incidental. Hence, tracking practices continue to be used in most high schools in the United States specially for English and mathematics.
instructions. Its proponents argue that “[tracking] increases educational effectiveness and promotes learning by permitting teachers to gear instruction to the ability level of the students” (Hallinan, 1994). However, although I concede that it could be easier to gear instruction for a “homogeneous” group, there has been no conclusive evidence that supports the idea that ability grouping is effective for all students involved (Lefkowitz, 1972, Nelson, 2001, Boaler, 2005, Stanley & Chambers, 2018). On the contrary, researchers have documented extensively both the long- and short-term harms of ability grouping or tracking (Losen, 1999, p. 519).

Researchers like Ford (2014) posit that ability grouping, particularly gifted education programs as defined and implemented in the United States, is “elitist and meritocratic and constitutes a form of educational triage and segregation” (p. 149). Proponents of tracking argue that the practice helps students with high ability levels engage in content that challenges their intellectual ability (Ogletree, 1969). Although proponents of tracking don’t say so directly, the research demonstrates that there is a specific type of student that gifted programs cater to: Students for whom educational failure will not be tolerated, in other words, White-privileged families (Ford, 2014, p. 149). Stanley and Chambers’ (2018) study examines the student perspective on the effects of tracking. The students in the study report that they felt that tracking was an unfair practice that isolated and marginalized them (p. 13). The students clearly saw that there was a hierarchy in the way students were placed academically. A hierarchy that placed African American and Latino students at the bottom and White students on top (p. 11). According to Losen (1999), students become keenly aware of who is considered smart and worthy of challenging academic opportunities.

Although proponents of tracking defend the merit of tracking based on the idea that it is “the only arrangement which ‘stretches’ the most able pupils and encourages the weakest”
(Ogletree, 1969), the research demonstrates that “there is no clear indication that [tracking] practices help students at the highest levels and that there is thoroughly convincing evidence that it is harmful to students in the lower levels” (p. 519). An area of concern that the literature highlights is how early tracking can start and how permanent the track usually is. Schools start tracking practices as early as elementary schools. Losen (1999) explains that:

Most Americans are familiar with assignment of elementary school students to reading groups, often with inoffensive names designed to obscure ability level, such as the Blue Birds, the Robins, and the Sparrows. Although rigid tracking assignments are more often associated with junior and senior high schools, inflexible between-class ability grouping is a common outgrowth of within-classroom ability groups… (p. 518)

These findings challenge the assumptions of most Americans who believe that tracking practices only occur in middle school and high school (Losen, 1999). The troubling fact is that the prolific and accepted use of tracking practices in public schools not only hurt students academically, they also impact a student’s future socioeconomic position in life (Hallinan, 1994; Oaks 1986; Rubin, 2006). Ford (2014) argues that African American and Latino students in public schools are not set up to succeed, they are set up to fail. He goes on to explain that practices such as tracking fuel social, economic, and educational disparities and they deny students the opportunity to access their intellectual and economic potential that, in turn, perpetuates the opportunity gap in public schools (p. 143). Although the access to full academic and economic potential of African American and Latino students may seem of concern to only African American and Latino families, it should, in fact, concern everyone who cares about the future economic development of our society.

The literature presents a strong case for why (Oakes, 1985, 1986, 1992; Murphy &
Hallinger, 1989; Wheelock, 1992, Rubin, 2006) tracking is an unfair practice in public schools. Rubin (2006) argues that tracking practices are a “vital part of how schools reproduce inequality, a structural arrangement through which individuals come to accept their own socioeconomic positions as inevitable and natural” (p. 5).

The normalizing of inequity in public schools and the consistent practice of denying African American and Latino students access to better educational outcomes is a factor that can go unnoticed in high performing school districts, where enrollment into the Gifted and Talented (GT) programs, AP classes, and Honors classes is high. Although enrollment into GT and AP courses is high in high performing suburban school districts, the research shows that African American and Latino students are overwhelmingly underrepresented in these courses on the national level. In 2011, the Office for Civil Rights reported that although Black students represent 16.7% of our public school system, they represented only 9.9% of students in the GT education programs. The percentage shows a 43% underrepresentation of African American students in GT programs. Latino students, although less severe, show a 31% underrepresented in GT programs (Ford, 2014). Contributing to the seriousness of the problem is that the tracking of students into low- and high-level classes is often permanent and “…are exacerbated over time leading to real, tangible differences in academic attainment in later years” (Chambers et al., 2009, p. 45).

The practice of tracking Black and Latino students in special education, remedial, and low-level tracks and excluding them from GT, Honors, and AP classes also serves to perpetuate stereotypes among students. It sends the loud message that Black and Latino students are not intellectuals and they do not belong in rigorous academic classes and that they are deficient, and undeserving of a high-level education. Ford (2013a) reports that “African American and
Hispanic families and students frequently express concerns about isolation and alienation from classmates and educators” (p. 147). This type of segregation impacts Black and Latino students not only academically but also psychologically and emotionally. Like all students, Black and Latino students want to feel included, valued, they want to have friends in classmates who see them as equals, not as their subordinates (Ford, 2013, 2014; Ford, Gratham & Whiting, 2008).

Although tracking practices are widely accepted and normalized in U.S. public schools, when one looks at the policy as an effective and equitable tool, the research demonstrates that there are clear disparities between what is believed and the reality. The research demonstrates that African American and Latino students continue to be segregated in public schools, they continue to experience schooling very differently than their White counterparts because their race plays a crucial role in how they are perceived by society (Bergh et al., 2010; Diamond, 2006; Diamond et al., 2007; Gordon, 2012; Hughes, 2003; Levine & Eubanks, 1990; Noguera, 2008; Strayhorn, 2009; Tyler, 2016; Tyler et al., 2016). Londen’s (1995) study corroborates this sentiment. Her study revealed that there was a clear ethnic bias in the way students were assigned to ability-leveled groupings and that this practice demonstrably harmed students assigned to lower track because of bias (p. 712). Londen (1995) found that teachers generally placed students based on their impression and beliefs about the students, even if their beliefs did not match the student’s test scores and performance. Tracking is a detrimental and harmful practice that is influenced heavily by teacher bias, unfortunately, it is not the only biased practice in public schools impacted by the teacher belief system. The criminalization of African American and Latino students through unjust and unequitable disciplinary practices, further impacts the ability of African American and Latino students to be successful in school and within our society.
The Discipline Gap

The inception of the zero tolerance policy of the 1980s gave schools an avenue by which to justify the overdisciplining and criminalization of African American and Latino students. “The philosophy behind zero tolerance policies was to equally and fairly punish all school offenses regardless of the severity of the offense…to foster a culture of learning, and deter misconduct in school” (Okilwa & Robert, 2017, p. 241). However, the stringent policies only served to exacerbate the discipline problem (Anyon et al., 2017; Freeman & Steidl, 2016; Gregory & Weinstein, 2007). Where once school administrators would mediate minor disciplinary infractions on their own, now the schools are referring such infractions to the police for arrest or other judicial follow-up (Freeman & Steidl, 2016, p. 171). Such practices gave way to higher rates of suspension and expulsion and arrest. The suspensions, expulsions, and arrests are not, however, proportional to the school populations. African American boys in particular are impacted drastically by this policy. Freeman and Steidl (2016) explain that, “while out-of-school suspension rates have doubled over the past 50 years, they have almost tripled among Black students” (p. 172). This particularly harsh trend “mirrors the mounting punitiveness in the criminal justice system” (Welch & Payne, 2010, p. 25). African American students are more likely to be excluded from the educative process and/or receive harsher disciplines for the same infraction than their White peers (Laura, 2011; Mizel et al., 2016; Okilwa & Robert, 2017). The frequent rate at which African American students are removed from the educative process provides a direct conduit for these students to be exposed to the juvenile justice system (Skiba, et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Welch & Payne, 2010). This process is commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. Therefore, the discipline structures in American public schools lead African American and Latino students toward criminal consequences and permanently
disadvantages them from receiving a just and equitable education. Unfortunately, the glaring injustice of the criminalization of African American and Latino students is not enough to eliminate the practice. Why not?

There are many systemic factors that impact the punitive punishment of African American students in public schools. “[S]tructural issues such as unequal school funding, limited access to highly qualified teachers, and the concentration of security guards in school serving low-income students of color [are] reproducing discipline gaps” (Anyon et al., 2017, p. 391). However, very few researchers directly address how to solve these systemic concerns. The “misconduct is understood as an indicator of student’s cognitive or developmental deficits” (Anyon et al., 2017, p. 391), rather than being a product of the institutional context. This focus ignores social inequity and makes it difficult to solve the problem because the root cause is ignored. Anyon et al. (2017) explain that “although popular recommendations for discipline reform are framed as responsive to the needs of youth of color, they tend to be colorblind in their implementation…” (p. 410). Chapman (2013) agrees with Anyon et al. (2017) when he argues that schools fail to highlight or discuss race and racism as a root cause for the discipline disparities that exists because they adhere to the belief of color blindness. This narrative “allows school adults to disregard the racial identities of students by solely viewing them as individuals who are divorced from the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape their past and present experiences (Anyon et al., 2017,p. 614). He goes on to argue that in White-majority schools, color blindness poses many challenges for students to overcome, particularly the connection between color blindness, White privilege, and the maintenance of White supremacy (p. 614). Both Anyon et al. (2017) and Chapman (2013) agree that these disadvantaged become evident not only through the relationship of the adults in public schools and the students of color, but also the curricular and
behavioral policies that negatively impact the success of students of Black and Latino students in these settings.

**Teacher Belief Systems**

The literature demonstrates that although the discipline disproportionality is a problem that most integrated schools have, the solution to the problem is often centered around fixing or punishing the student (Laura, 2011; Mizel et al., 2016). This approach negates the need for teachers to get the adequate training to understand their student population. Anyon et al. (2017) corroborate this point when they posit that “district-level policies do not mandate training for educators on implicit bias or culturally responsive pedagogy, eliminate color-blind codes of conduct that criminalize the dress and mannerisms associated with youth of color, or address structural concerns such as resource allocation, teacher preparedness, or school segregation” (p. 401). Not properly training teachers to be successful teachers of African American and Latino students is causing an epidemic in teacher retention. Studies reveal that White teachers felt unsure about their ability to teach students of color (Cabello & Burnstein, 1995); they tend to have stereotypical beliefs about African American and Latino students (Archembault et al., 2012) and they often explain lack of student performance on cultural deficiency models (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005).

According to Hinojosa and Moras (2009) “the teacher plays a very important role in the success of students. Teachers determine students’ grades, academic track, and their behavioral evaluations, thus arguably playing a central role in the students’ ultimate success (or failure) in school” (p. 29). According to research, “teachers do not expect Black students to perform as well academically as their White counterparts, and teachers hold higher academic expectations in general for White students” (Hinojosa & Moras, 2009). As highlighted in the literature, “teachers
are not immune to racial discourse and the resulting internalization of stereotypes and ideologies. The lack of teacher training that focuses on understanding these stereotypes and ideologies is impacting the retention of highly qualified teachers in public schools” (Hanushek et al., 2002). It also highlights the importance of training and retaining teachers whose race and social class reflect that of the population of students that they teach.

**The Teacher Gap**

The teacher gap is defined by researchers (Chu, 2011; Nieto, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Irvine, 2003; Ford, 2014) as the growing disparity between the race of the students in public schools and the race of the teachers that teach and service them. According to the aforementioned researchers, the disparity between teachers and the students that they service heavily impacts the resource and opportunity gap. It impacts the opportunity gap because White teachers, due to their epistemology and experiences, can unknowingly have low expectations of Black and Latino students (Archembault et al., 2012; Bergh et al., 2010; Cabello & Burstein, 1995; Gorski, 2010; Hinojosa, 2009). These expectations are shaped by their “inaccurate assumptions regarding the relationship between, race, academic ability, and intelligences (i.e., the belief that Black students are uncooperative and unmotivated)” (Chu, 2011). This circumstance often favors privileged students, which hinders the educational opportunities of African American and Latino students and, consequently, provides them with an inferior education. In addition, Ladson-Billings (1998) agrees that many teachers see African American students as deficient and lacking the intellect to do well in school. She argues that these beliefs stem from the devaluation and denigration of blackness in our culture and society at large. Chu (2011) adds that, in schools, characteristics of middle-class White children are used as the only representation of comportment and competence. She also argues that “schools have ignored or
rejected different cultural expressions of development that are normal and adequate and on which school skills and knowledge can be built” (p. 202). Nieto (2010) agrees with Chu (2011) and Ladson-Billings (2011) and adds that the ignorance of a student’s ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds can be detrimental to both the academic development of a culturally and linguistically diverse student and their self-worth in public schools.

The reality is that schools in the United States are more racially and linguistically diverse than ever before, yet, White teachers continue to be the overwhelming majority in the teaching force. Irvine (2003) reports that teachers of color represent only 9% of the teacher force in the United States. She asserts that “[f]orty percent of the nation’s schools have no teachers of color on staff, and many students will complete their K-12 schooling without being taught by a single teacher of color” (p. 52). Irvine argues, that this type of racial disparity between teacher and student is likely to cause cultural conflict in the classroom and that “[b]ecause the culture of children is unique and often misunderstood, ignored, denigrated or discounted, these students are likely to experience cultural dissonance in schools, which can result in low achievement and behavioral problems” (p. 55). This cultural divide in public schools leads to a student-teacher divide, which can lead to a divide between the schools and the communities in which they are situated (Irvine, 2003).

The importance of teachers that understand the perspective or are able to empathize with the perspective of the students they teach is undeniable. Pierre (2014) argues that teachers that are successful with Black and Latino students… “are intentional about making connections between new information that is being presented and student’s existing knowledge and cultural frameworks” (p. 215). To do this successfully, teachers must engage in deconstructing color-blind ideology, understanding their belief system, and exploring the sociopolitical context that
impact dominant deficit ideologies (Anders et al., 2005; Cabello & Burnstein, 1995; Greenwood & Christian, 2008; Gay, 2010; Gorski, 2010; Hinojosa & Mora, 2009; Ladson-Billins, 2009; Lynn et al., 2010).

**Reframing Teacher Belief Systems**

As just discussed, teacher belief systems and expectations “can differentially affect the members of different student groups, favor non-stigmatized groups over stigmatized groups, and thereby exacerbate the achievement [disparities] for groups of students from different ethnic backgrounds” (Bergh et al., 2010). Researchers like Irvine (2003), Landson-Billings (2009), Nieto (2010), Gay (2010), Yosso (2005), and Delpit (2006) have investigated effective strategies to educating African American and Latino students. These authors all agree that a quality, culturally relevant teacher can positively impact the academic opportunity of African American and Latino students. The question is how can teachers transform their belief system and become culturally relevant? According to Henze et al. (1998), in order to better service all students, teachers must first be willing to “break the silence about race, racism, and power differences in the U.S. educational system. This undertaking, however, will require honest reflection and self-examination as well as ongoing dialogue” (p. 193). Gay (2010) suggest that teachers who have engaged in honest reflection and self-examination are more opened to engaging in culturally responsive education. Nieto (2000), proposes that it is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to teach in our increasingly changing demographic landscape. Nieto (2000) suggests that first, institutions of higher education need to take a stand on social justice and diversity by “preparing teachers to help their students face the challenges of a pluralistic and rapidly changing society. Practicing and prospective teachers also need to learn how to promote the learning of all students, and to develop educational environments that are fair
and affirming” (p. 183). Secondly, Nieto proposes that colleges and universities make social justice ubiquitous in teacher education (p. 183). In other words, it is not enough to just “celebrate diversity,” schools must make an effort to discuss social justice and the root causes of inequality. Finally, Nieto recommends that institutions of higher learning promote teaching as a lifelong journey of transformation. She explains that “the process of affirming diversity of students begins first as a teacher’s journey. A journey presupposes that the traveler will change along the way, and teaching is no exception” (p. 184). Cabello and Burnstein’s (1995) study corroborates Nieto’s point and adds that the acquisition of new knowledge is not enough to change teachers’ belief system. They argue that “beliefs are altered through experiences over time, involving new knowledge, teaching, and reflection. These experiences create dissonance in which teachers question their practices and may ultimately change their beliefs” (p. 286).

Unfortunately, teacher preparation programs are not engaging pre-service teachers in the type of transformative learning necessary to be effective teachers of African American and Latino students (Siwatu, 2011; Nieto, 2000). Without the necessary preparation to teach in today’s culturally and linguistically diverse schools, many teachers will find themselves leaving the profession (Garcia et al., 2010; Hanushek et al., 2002). Ladson-Billings (1995), Irvine (2003), and Gay (2002) propose that professional development with focus of culturally responsive teaching can help teachers confront implicit bias, understand the social and historical context that impacts student behaviors and performance, and understand their belief systems (Gay, 2002; García et al., 2010).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Gay (2010), introduced culturally responsive teaching after researching the successful practices of African American teachers teaching African American students and other
disenfranchised students. She defines culturally responsive teaching as a means for discovering the full learning potential of ethnically diverse students by “…simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychological abilities” (p. 21). Furthermore, she explains that to do so, teachers must “use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant” (p. 31). Griner and Steward (2012), identified the following characteristics that comprise culturally responsive teaching:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning, and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other’s cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 589).

As has been previously demonstrated, researchers agree that the key to successfully promoting culturally responsive teaching lies in the careful rethinking of race and education, in the deconstruction of deficit paradigms and culture of power in our schools, and in our “blaming the victim” philosophies that continue to exacerbate the disparities between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts. Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) add that as educators we must also confront the unconscious racism that plagues our policies and practices – practices that negatively impact the academic achievements of Black and Latino students in public schools.
To do so, we must facilitate training in public schools that develop culturally responsive teachers.

### Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers

According to researchers (Howard, 2003; Schmeichel, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Irvine, 2003; Gay, 2010), there are two major tenets that develop a culturally responsive teacher. The first tenet is that teachers must be able to critically analyze issues of epistemology, race, ethnicity, culture, and social class and be able to understand how these concepts impact their view and perception of the culturally and linguistically diverse students that they teach. Howard (2003), adds that not only do teachers need to have the capacity to critically reflect on their own racial and cultural identities, but they must also be able to recognize how these identities coexist with the cultural composition of their students (p. 196). Teachers must dive into and develop a definition for what racism, power, and privilege are. Some researchers (Anders, Bryan & Noblit, 2005; Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998; McIntosh, 1988) propose that, teachers who belong to the dominant culture of power must critically and deeply reflect on and deconstruct their Whiteness as a privilege. Anders, Bryan and Noblit (2005) agree that to create inclusive and tolerant classroom communities, it is imperative for teachers to confront White privilege (p. 97). The argument is that personal experience cannot be separated from education. The experiences and ideals of the teacher permeate every aspect of the classroom dynamic. Furthermore, Anders, Bryan and Noblit (2005) argue that reflecting on White privilege can help teachers that are entrenched in the lens of power to look outside of that lens and thus “…yield understandings of how one’s life could be otherwise” (p. 98). Similarly, McIntosh (1998), emphasizes the importance of unpacking what she calls the “invisible knapsack” of privilege. She argues that to “redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions.” [She
McIntosh (1998) posits that those in power “keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects” (p. 32).

The second tenet of developing cultural responsive teachers is the recognition that there may be several different perspectives on the same issue and that those perspectives are heavily influenced by our gender, class background, and racial/ethnic identity (Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998, p. 189). They must use this perspective to “develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Garcia, Arias, Murri & Serna, 2009). Maye and Day (2012) add that understanding cultural norms and values is important because schools are social locations that promote a culture of power and “like all social systems, afford greater status to some and offer different access to power to others” (p. 20). Teachers that are aware of the culture of power in schools can work to actively create and implement multiple ways of deconstructing this culture in their classrooms. They can aid students in building knowledge that includes their cultural and linguistic strengths and help promote and nourish authentic relationships between the teacher and her students.

**Impact on Students**

The major researchers in the field of culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education (Nieto, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Banks, 2009) assert that culturally responsive teaching is empowering and validating for all students. Particularly students that have been traditionally disadvantaged and forgotten in U.S. public schools. Gay (2010) argues that because culturally responsive teaching acknowledges and legitimizes students’
culture heritage, traditions, language, and lived sociocultural realities, students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. They feel included in the academic community of learners. This sense of belonging honors a student’s human dignity, and promotes their self-concepts. It allows them to genuinely engage and foster meaningful relationships with their teachers and classmates (p. 33). Furthermore, Gay (2010) explains that “because culturally responsive teaching is empowering, it enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners. Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence and courage, and the will to act” (p. 34).

Nieto (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2009) agree teacher and student engagement in culturally responsive teaching is empowering because it encourages all of the parties to think critically about educational access and viewpoints. Nieto (2010) posits that:

A critical education…expects students to engage in learning with others, to be curious, to question, and to become problem solvers. Because a critical pedagogy is founded on the belief that problems and issues can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, there is rarely just one right answer to most problems. When students have the opportunity to view situations and events from a number of viewpoints, and when they begin to analyze and question what they are learning, critical thinking, reflection, and action are promoted. (p. 131)

If culturally responsive teaching were to become the norm in all classrooms in U.S. public schools, the above-mentioned researchers would agree that deficit paradigms, and the culture of power would gradually begin to dissipate and we would see a rise to the access to equity and academic success of African American and Latino students. However, while culturally responsive practices are not new or revolutionary, “they remain a radical conception for
traditional school systems that have failed to examine the overarching influence of institutionalized racism in America and how it manifests in schools” (Mayfield & Wade, 2015, p. 3).

**Culturally Relevant Schools**

In her book *The Dream-Keepers, Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings outlines school practices that not only promote success among African American students, but also encourages teachers to persistently question and delegitimize the permanence of racism in our public schools. She recommends that to cultivate culturally responsive schools, schools must:

- Recruit teacher candidates who have expressed an interest and a desire to work with African American students.
- Provide educational experiences that help teachers understand the central role of culture.
- Provide teacher candidates with opportunities to critique the system in ways that will help them choose a role as either agent of change or defender of the status quo.
- Systemically require teachers to have prolonged immersion in African American culture.
- Provide opportunities for observation of culturally relevant teaching.
- Conduct student teaching over a longer period of time and in a more controlled environment (pp. 143-148).

Schools that are committed to implementing these principles will work from a strengths-based perspective. Rather than judging students for their perceived deficits, a culturally responsive school and its teachers would work in concert to honor and respect the knowledge that African American and Latino students have to offer to the curriculum and the classroom environment.
Synthesis of Literature

This literature review has established that, “even in affluent, ostensibly integrated suburban communities, the racial inequality is stark” (Diamond, 2006, p. 502). These inequalities continue to be perpetuated for three major reasons. First, racial inequalities as a result from a long history of discrimination and “otherizing” in the United States have not been sufficiently addressed. Instead, institutions continue to search for excuses that blame the disenfranchised for their educational circumstances. The assumption is repeatedly made that there are deficits and limitations within the African American and Latino communities. Secondly, schools’ unceasing inequitable institutionalized practices contribute to the educational disadvantages of African American and Latino Students. Practices such as tracking, and access into gifted and talented programs, consistently keep African American and Latino students in the least advantaged location for learning. For progress to happen, we must eliminate these school-based inequities. Finally, “the deeply ingrained belief that Whites are intellectually and culturally superior to Blacks [and Latinos] has not been fully confronted and dismissed” (Diamond, 2006, p. 502).

The literature revealed two clear and distinctive scholarly opinions to explain why academic discrepancies between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts persist. One line of research put the onus of responsibility for the achievement disparities on African American and Latino students and their families. This line of research commonly dismisses the impact of race, the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical conditions that African Americans and Latinos face in the United States. The second scholarly opinion in the literature puts the impact of race in the forefront. These researchers explain the importance of understanding how race impacts all aspect of schooling for African American and Latino students in public schools. According to Henze et al.,
(1998) the reluctance to face racism, power, and privilege in our public schools is the key contributor to the perseverance of the achievement disparities. These researchers agree that race matters. Howard (2003) explains that “an examination of the opportunity gap along racial lines underscores clear racial divisions about who is benefiting from school and who is not” (p. 196). Norguera (2008) adds that race is a key factor in the underachievement of African American, and Latino students because the notion of inferiority has been a deeply seeded belief of Americans and it has been propagated in the media, pop culture, and in the schools that reflect the values of that culture (p. 95).

As the literature has revealed, the persistence of race as a predictor of the opportunity gap in high performing school districts can be addressed by implementing the tenets of culturally relevant teaching and addressing and confronting teacher belief systems and perspectives. Giving teachers the opportunity to unpack privilege, explore historical context that impact the social and economic conditions of African Americans and Latinos, and explore culturally relevant and implementable teacher strategies will help shift teacher belief systems and perspectives. The shift in belief system can, in turn, help schools to be cognizant of the presence of race, power, and privilege in and within their context and aid in promoting a culture of critical analysis from both the teacher and the students that they service. This is the type of work necessary to create a more just and equitable educational environment for African American and Latino students in public schools. Cabello and Burstein (1995) corroborate the latter when they argue that:

…preparation for teaching requires more than just knowledge base or repertoire of skills; teachers must be able to make judgments about instruction, drawing from their knowledge and experience of individual students and situations in their classroom. Learning to make such judgments with diverse students involves teacher sensitivity to students’ cultural and
linguistic backgrounds, knowledge about how such backgrounds influence learning and teaching, and awareness of alternative teaching methods addressing these students’ needs. (p. 287).

In order for our schools to move forward and for African American and Latino students to have academic success, it is imperative that our schools address the culture of power and privilege that create barriers for the achievement of these students. In our increasingly pluralistic society and the drastically changing demographic landscape of our urban and suburban public schools, it is crucial that educators own the responsibility of preparing all of our students to be productive and successful citizens. As educators we must constantly examine the factors that contribute to the normalization of failure in our public schools and we must continue to challenge the deficit paradigms and the culture of power that plague the success of African American and Latino students in our public schools. The literature demonstrates that there is a need for continued investigation, discourse, and critical reflection about the relationship between race and achievement in our schools. We must continue to challenge teachers to understanding their biases and assumptions and challenge power differences in the U.S. educational systems. Exposing teachers to transformative learning that helps them shift their belief system and implementing strategies that help deconstruct implicit bias and deficit paradigms are essential to changing disadvantages faced by African American and Latino students in U.S. public schools. Implementing critical pedagogical practices, such as culturally responsive teaching, is essential for empowering educators and students to purposefully break hegemony and compliance with the dominant discourse. The following chapter will provide an articulation of the selected methodology for this research project.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Question
What are the experiences of teachers who have participated in a cultural proficiency or culturally relevant training program?

The goal of this study was to examine the experiences of teachers that are participating in or have participated in a culturally relevant professional development program. The Cultural Proficiency Professional Development (CPPD) program that the teachers participated in aims to make teachers aware of how their experiences and belief systems impact the way they interact with students and the society at large. A review of the corresponding literature identified that deficit paradigms, implicit biases, and an adherence to the dominant ideology concerning achievement disparities impact the way achievement disparities are discussed and addressed. The research also indicates that to impact achievement disparities, it is imperative that pre-service and in-service teachers be given the opportunity to explore their biases and assumptions and challenge power differences in the U.S. educational systems. The research asserts that exposing teachers to experiences that shift their belief systems and help them deconstruct deficit paradigms and implicit biases are essential for providing public school students with a just and equitable education. This study will explore the experiences of teachers engaging in a culturally relevant professional development program, and will strive to understand how the experiences and belief systems of the teachers impact the way they interact with their African American and Latino students in the classroom. To understand how teachers construct new belief systems or transform belief systems, a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm was utilized.

Research Paradigm
A constructivism-interpretivism paradigm assumes that there are multiple realities and that reality cannot be discovered and measured. A constructivism-interpretivism paradigm
asserts that reality is a construction of the human mind (Merriam, 1991). In a phenomenological research study, a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm assumes that meaning is embedded in the experiences of the participants and mitigated through the investigator’s own perceptions of the world (Merriam, 1991). This paradigm necessitates researcher-participant dialogue so that the researcher can understand the lived experiences of the participant (Ponterotto, 2005). To gather valuable data from participants, the researcher must engage the participants in deep reflection and conversation to surface feelings and information. To further facilitate the exchange of feelings and information, there must be a mutual trust between the participant and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). When mutual trust is present, the participant will allow meaning to be brought to the surface. As data surfaces, the researcher must be aware that the experiences and values of the researcher are connected, not separated from the data (Ponterotto, 2005). Strong data collection relied on the meaningful interactions between the participant and the researcher throughout the interview process and the depth upon which the data or phenomenon is reflected. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to frame and make sense of the data collected.

**Research Method**

IPA is a young methodology, which was first introduced as an approach to psychology in the mid-1990s by Jonathan Smith (Shinebourne, 2011). IPA is concerned with the exploration of a phenomenon through the experience of a participant with that phenomenon. Its goal is to detail how participants make sense of an experience through an interpretative analysis of that experience. According to Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006), this type of interpretative analysis positions the descriptions of the phenomenon “in relation to a wider social, cultural, and perhaps even theoretical, context” (p. 107). This interpretative analysis allows the researcher to have a
personal, more speculative relationship with the data. It also encourages the researcher to think
about what the data means for the participants (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997; Larkin et al.,
2006). Due to the interpretative nature of this methodology, there is an inherent relationship
between the participant and the researcher. In fact, Larkin et al. (2006) argue that the “analytic
process cannot ever achieve a genuinely first-person account – the account is always constructed
by participant and researcher” (p. 104).

Although IPA is a new methodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography
inform its epistemological framework (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The phenomenological
aspect of IPA is heavily influenced by the work of phenomenologists Heidegger, Husserl,
Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. However, the most notable methodological influence in IPA comes
from the work of both Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological
philosophy, posits that “experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and its own
terms” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). It involves understanding the human experience
of a phenomenon to determine the essential qualities of that experience (Smith, Flowers, &
Larkin, 2009). IPA’s adaptation to Husserl’s philosophy is that, rather than being concerned with
the essence of the experience, IPA “attempts to capture particular experiences as experienced for
particular people” (p. 16). Husserl, who was a philosopher, wrote theoretically and in an abstract
manner about the philosophy of understanding the lived experience of a participant. Most of
Husserl’s work was “concerned with first-person processes – that is, what he had to do himself to
conduct phenomenological inquiry on his own experience” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.
15). Unlike psychologists, Husserl was not concerned with analyzing other people’s experiences.
His interest was about stepping out of our “natural attitude” or becoming aware of one’s
perceptions and being conscious of one’s own experience with a given phenomenon. IPA
borrows from the latter perspective and the aspect of analyzing the experience of others from Heidegger, who will be discussed later.

Husserl suggested that, to capture the essence of the experience accurately, there is a need to “consider the consequences of our taken-for-granted ways of living in the familiar, everyday worlds of objects” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 13). He recommends that we bracket or set aside our preconceived notions and assumptions of the world to pay closer attention to our perception of that world. Husserl’s contribution to IPA lies in capturing both the essence of the experience and the process of reflection and awareness. In contrast, Heidegger’s contribution to phenomenology is less abstract. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, merged hermeneutics and phenomenology in his approach. His phenomenology is concerned “with examining something which may be latent, or disguised, as it emerges into the light. But it is also interested in examining the obvious thing as it appears at the surface” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 24). The Heideggerian phenomenology adheres to an existential perspective, one that situates the meaning-making of the participants in their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Heidegger’s phenomenological perspective is that meaning lies in the interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, Heidegger’s perspective has influenced IPA in the emphasis given to understanding and people’s meaning-making process. IPA recognizes that understanding an experience or phenomenon is an interpretative process, one that relies on both the experience of the participant and the interpretative endeavor, upon which both participant and researcher embark. It is a symbiotic relationship, without the phenomenological experience, there would be nothing to understand or interpret and without the experience, hermeneutics or meaning-making would not be seen (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 22).
As demonstrated above, both hermeneutics and phenomenology play a significant role in the theoretical underpinnings of IPA. The third theoretical underpinning is idiography. “An idiographic approach aims for an in-depth focus on the particular and commitment to a detailed finely textured analysis” (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 23). Researchers must be “thorough and systematic” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p. 29). As a consequence of this, IPA uses small, carefully selected groups of participants. According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), “it may often make very effective use of single case analysis” (p. 29). This philosophy also allows the IPA researcher to examine patterns of meaning and reflection across the experiences of the participants, and to look for the similarities and differences to produce detailed accounts of those shared experiences (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 23).

**Alignment**

This study explored how teachers made sense of their transformative experience in a CPPD program. Since IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of an experience, “which is of particular moment or significance to the person” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 33), the methodology aligned seamlessly with transformative learning theory. The transformation experienced by the teachers in the program was a moment of particular significance to the participant. Transformative learning theory provided the lens to understand the transformative learning experiences of the teacher and IPA provided the window into the individual participant. Thus, by “gaining insight into the individual, insight into the whole [experience was] achieved” (Pringle et al., 2010, p. 21).

Not only did IPA provide insight into the individuals in the study, but IPA also recognized the role of the researcher in making sense of the participant’s meaning-making. Smith (2004) describes this process as double hermeneutics. “The participant is trying to make sense of
their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world” (p. 40). In this study, IPA methodology involved interpretation of the participants’ experiences, influenced by my participation and experiences in the program. Thus, as a researcher, my prior experiences inevitably impacted how I made sense of my participants’ accounts. In IPA, it is important to be reflective of the process, be conscious of the preconceptions in advance, and bracket or leave them out of my analysis. As Smith et al. (2009) put it, “the whole is the researcher’s ongoing biography, and the part is the encounter with a new participant, as part of a new research project” (p. 35).

**Reflexivity Journal**

Throughout the research process, I collected and recorded my observations in my journal. I used my reflective journal not only to document my experience as a new researcher and interviewer, but also to unpack the interview process and my reactions to the responses of the participants. This process helped me become aware of what I was thinking and it made me aware of my biases that surfaced before the data analysis process. Maintaining a reflexivity journal throughout the data collection process allowed me to reflect on how I was experiencing and interacting with the data and helped me remain aware that, as the interviewer and researcher, I was the main instrument of data collection and analysis.

**Population and Recruitment**

The research was conducted in the district where I am employed. The district is a medium-sized high performing public school in a Mid-Atlantic State. The district houses more than 50 schools and services more than 50,000 students. The students serviced by the district are 22% Asian, 24% Black/African American, 11.3% Hispanic/Latino, 35.8% White, and 22.7% students that receive Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS). The demographic makeup of each
school fluctuates depending on where the school is situated in the county. The district houses schools in both urban and suburban areas.

I solicited participation consent from the district by submitting the “Permission to Conduct Research” application with the district. The district approved my application and granted me permission to conduct the study. To establish a participant pool, I worked with the office in charge of the CPPD programs. They shared a list of program participants from the previous three years and gave me permission to contact participants via email. A Call to Participants was sent to the participant list with an attached survey. The survey was an adapted version of King’s (2009) Learning Activities Survey. King (2009) granted me permission to include the survey in my study. The survey is designed to identify when a participant has experienced transformative learning as a result of their participation in a course or program. Initially, the tool was going to be used to help narrow the field of participants by identifying those that had experienced a perspective shift.

The Call to Participants did not garner many responses, thus there was no need to narrow the participant pool. A total of 12 potential participants responded to the survey and seven responded that they were interested in participating in the study. After initial conversations with all seven participants only five of the potential participants met the criteria set forth by the study. The study involved a total of five participants. The participants were assigned a pseudonym by gender (Shane, Vanessa, Julie, Richard, and Rosa). Additionally, to maintain the anonymity of the school district, the schools in which the participants work and the names of their colleagues have also been given pseudonyms.

**Sampling Strategies and Criteria**
The Learning Activities Survey (King, 2009) identified demographic information such as gender, marital status, race, and prior education, to facilitate the selection process and ensure a diverse group of participants. The survey also identified whether or not the participant engaged in transformative learning. To meet the criteria of the study, participants had to experience transformative change or perspective shift as a participant in the CPPD program. The Learning Activities Survey identified that five out of the seven participants had engaged in transformative learning as a result of the CPPD program. King (2009) includes a guide for identifying perspective transformation through the survey. The Learning Activities Survey modified for this study identified item numbers 1, 2, 3, 13, and 15 as items that guided the participants to reflect on an experience of change and delve into what exactly it was, how it happened, and what contributed to its occurrence (King, 2009, p. 15). As recommended by King (2009), this study used the information from these items to determine a score for each participant on a scale of one to three. This Performance Transformation Index or “PT-Index” indicated whether learners had a perspective transformation experience in relationship to their participation in the CPPD program (p. 16). The items were scored in the following way: PT-Index=3: whether they had a perspective shift related to the CPPD program; PT-Index=2: whether they had a perspective shift not associated with the program; and PT-Index=1: whether they did not have a perspective transformation experience.

From the seven participants that agreed to participate in the study, the participants with the highest PT-Index scores became the participants selected for the study. Participants were asked to participate in a round of interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a location chosen or agreed upon by the participants. Before the initiation of the interviews, the participants were advised about the Informed Consent Form, which explained
the purpose of the research and why they were chosen to participate in the study. Once the participants signed the Informed Consent Form, the interview process began. At the completion of the study, they were sent a debriefing statement via email and participants were given a $20 Starbucks gift card for their participation in the study.

**Data Collection**

Initially, I was interested in implementing Seidman’s (2013) “in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing” strategy. Seidman (2013) and his colleagues propose an in-depth interview. In this approach “interviewers use, primarily, but not exclusively open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants’ responses to those questions. The goal is to have participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (p. 14). Seidman’s approach seemed like the right approach for the type of interviews I wanted to conduct; however, my lack of experience conducting research and the time limitations I had to interview the participants made the IPA semi-structured interview the best option for the study.

IPA is still a young phenomenological methodology and, although it has established itself as a qualitative methodology, there are only a few prominent scholars in the field. The leading scholars of IPA Smith, Osborn, Larkin, and Flowers all recommend the same method for exemplary data collection in IPA. They agree that IPA should utilize a “flexible data collection instrument” (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997, p. 57). They recommend that IPA studies collect data through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee, facilitates empathy, and allows the researcher to guide the interview based on the participant’s interests and concerns. The semi-structured interview also
allows for greater flexibility of coverage and… it tends to produce richer data (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997, p. 59). I began the study with a pilot interview.

The pilot interview was the first step to the data collection process. I was able to conduct a pilot interview with a friend and colleague that had participated in levels 1 and 2 of the CPPD program and met the participant criteria for the study. The pilot interview took place before I conducted the interviews with the participants in the study. The purpose of this interview was to practice the interview process and to get feedback about the quality and clarity of the questions. The pilot interview was helpful because it provided feedback about two questions that were unclear to the pilot participant and that needed clarification. Using the feedback provided by the pilot participant, I reworded the questions to be less vague. The pilot interview was also helpful in establishing a more accurate time frame for the length of the interview. I initially divided the interview process into two separate days. One day for the initial background information, and a second day to talk about the participant’s experiences in the program. After the pilot interview, it was clear that I would only need one day for both parts of the interview and no more than 60 minutes to conduct the interview.

Prior to the interviews, I reexamined the participant’s responses to the Learning Activities Survey. Reading the survey again helped me gain an understanding of the types of activities that had an impact on the participants. I also used the participant’s responses on the survey to look for similarities in their responses. This exercise allowed me to gain some insight into the participant’s experiences before the interviews. The Learning Activities survey also provided the background information I needed to make connections with participants throughout the interview process.
I reached out to participants via email to establish availability and possible interview locations. Once the participant and I agreed on a time, the participant suggested the meeting place and we planned to meet to conduct the interview at the chosen location. For the most part, the participants were eager to share their experiences and participate in the study. The dialogue during the interviews was warm and friendly and most of the participants were relaxed. The conversations had a natural flow to them and did not seem labored. It was evident in the interviews that this topic was important to the participants and that they wanted to talk about it.

During the interview, I asked open-ended questions. The participants responded to the open-ended questions and often expanded on their responses by adding stories and examples to support their responses. Story-telling and making sense of one’s experiences is a key aspect of Interpretative Phenomenological studies and an essential part of understanding the participant’s point of view (Smith, et al., 2009). I built the skill to elicit story-telling from participants with each interview I conducted. I began to follow up on questions by asking participants to give me an example of what they meant. The more I followed up with these types of questions, the richer the conversation became and the more examples the participants shared to support their answers. As the interviews progressed, the participants began to elaborate on their responses without my follow-ups. The conversations had a natural flow and the participants did not seem to feel overwhelmed by the questions or at a loss for words with their responses.

I was the sole research instrument in this study. I conducted my interviews at a location that was convenient to the participant. To record the interviews, I used a digital audio recorder with a USB drive. The identities of all participants were protected with the use of pseudonyms and all recordings were uploaded into my personal computer and stored in a password-protected file. All files were backed up into a cloud-based folder, which is also password protected. Once I
had completed all of my interviews, I sent the files to be transcribed. I used the transcription service rev.com. Once I received the transcription, I read each transcription while listening to the original audio. I wanted to ensure the transcription captured the exact words of the participants. I then sent the transcripts to the participants for member checking. All names and identifying information were removed from the paper copies to ensure anonymity for all participants. The paper copies are stored with my personal files. The electronic copies are stored in a password-protected file on my computer. All research data will be stored for five years and then permanently deleted.

**Data Coding and Analysis Process**

IPA does not have a single prescribed method of data analysis but rather a set of common processes and principles. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), recommend several strategies for data analysis. They recommend close line-by-line analysis, identification of emergent patterns within experiential material, the development of structure, frame, or gestalt, which illustrates the relationship between themes, the use of supervision, collaboration, or audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation, the development of a full narrative evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, and evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 79).

This study discovered themes and patterns by both keeping a detailed reflexivity journal and using In Vivo coding. I wrote in my journal after each interview. I reflected on the interviews, my major takeaways, concerns, my impression of each participants, and my analytic memos of participants. The journal was instrumental in helping me identify and bracket out my assumptions, preconceptions, and biases during data collection and analysis. The journal also facilitated my understanding of the participants. I was able to highlight the words and phrases
that summarized the narrative of each participant; these words focused my lens as I read through the transcripts and continued to code them.

I conducted three cycles of coding. During the first cycle I used In Vivo coding to capture the experiences that seemed to be the most significant and impactful to the participant’s belief systems. The words and phrases that I highlighted came from the experiences that dominated the conversations with each participant and what they spent most of their time talking about. Some of the codes generated in this round were: “I was a slacker”; “sheltered life”; “school was diverse by I was in GT”, “I learned that the standards for me were different.” This first cycle generated the baseline for understanding the experiences that shaped the perspectives and belief systems of the participants in the study. Many of these experiences were eventually categorized into the first theme of the study.

For the second cycle of coding I focused on the participants’ experiences after their participation in the CPPD program. Because the data sets started to become too large, to manage the data and organize themes, I used the software MAXQDA 2018. Some of the codes that emerged from this coding were: “I felt isolated”; “made me more conscious about the way I talk to my students”; “new way of addressing my students”; “I understand privilege,” and “taught me how to navigate in such a white space without letting my hurt damage other people.” It became clear as I started to categorize the experiences of the participants that they fell under three distinct types of experiences: the life experiences that impacted the participant’s way of knowing and experiencing the world; the awareness they gained as a result of their transformative experiences in the CPPD program; and the change in the practices and behavior of the participants as a result of their new frame of reference. In Vivo coding was very useful for me in this study. It was an organic and natural way for me to have a relationship with the voice of my
participants. Saldaña (2016) recommends this type of coding for new researchers because the style honors and prioritizes the participant’s voice. In Vivo coding gave me a window into the values and belief systems of my participants. It helped me understand their story through their own words. In Vivo coding also allowed me to understand both the meaning and context of specific words or phrases used by participants (Manning, 2017).

**Limitations**

There were several limitations that impacted the data collection process of this study. First, as a new researcher, I had little experience conducting interviews. Since I was the main instrument of data collection, my inexperience became a limitation. According to Seidman (2013), experienced researchers build or develop their skills as interviewers. He refers to it as an art form. He argues that experienced researchers understand when to redirect a question or response and they can listen and garner meaning from both what is being said and what is being implied. Although conducting the pilot interview helped me practice the process of interviewing and listening to participants, it was not enough to build expertise. The study would have had a richer data set from the participant interviews if I had more interviewing expertise.

A second limitation of this study is that I am a teacher who is deeply embedded into the cultural proficiency program for the district. I was a former cultural proficiency liaison for the school. In this role, I lead cultural proficiency workshops for my colleagues and I lead a professional learning committee focused around culturally responsive teaching. My personal perspective shift as participant in the CPPD program as well as my commitment to the work promoted by the program could have impacted the way I perceived the perspective shift or experiences of the teachers in the program. I had to be mindful of this bias throughout the data collection process. I did not want my biases to negatively influence or invalidate the data.
**Reciprocity**

As a researcher, my main goal in the interview process was to understand how the participants make sense of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2013). In this study, although I used the words of my participants to my own ends, I could offer my participants reciprocity. The interview process offered participants in the study the opportunity to: have their stories validated; make their voices heard and understood; and reflect on the meaning of their transformative experiences. For some of the participants, sharing the experience in the interview process was the first time that they reflected on the meaning and impact of their experience. Like Seidman (2013) suggests, in this study, I offered the participants the assurance that I would take them seriously, that I would respect and value what they said, and that I would honor the details of their lives (p. 110).

**Trustworthiness**

Establishing trust between the participants and me was essential for this study (Krefting, 1990). The relationship I built with each of my participants, along with their comfort level, was one of the most important aspects of this study. Since most of the participants and I had familiarity with each other, building a trusting environment during the interview process was not difficult. The participants trusted the validity of the study and were eager to share their experiences. To validate the trustworthiness of this study, I: conducted pilot interviews; kept a reflexivity journal; demonstrated prolonged engagement; and gave the participants an opportunity to member check the transcripts to ensure that their voice was accurately represented (Krefting, 1990).

A pilot interview was conducted before the interviews took place. The pilot interview was used to seek information on the clarity of the questions and to establish that the questions
were able to gather the information being sought. The participant for the pilot interview was an individual that meet the criteria for the study and was a good friend of mine. The goal was that the feedback received from the pilot interviews would improve the overall questions and the interview process.

I kept a reflexivity journal to record both my observations of the participants during the interview and my reflection of the overall narrative of each interview. These notes helped me remain aware of my own perspective as well as the perspective of the participants. I also took analytic memos or notes about impressions and facial expressions to add to the source of information being collected. Engaging this process of reflection was extremely useful in identifying themes, features, or patterns that arose (Seidman, 2013).

According to Krefting (1990), prolonged engagement is when the researcher spends an extended period of time with the participants. She argues that “credibility requires adequate submersion in the research setting to enable recurrent patterns to be identified and verified” (p. 217). I have been an active participant in the CCPD program. I have participated in the program for two years and facilitate workshops for colleagues that experience transformative change. This knowledge provided me with a deep understanding of the CCPD culture and provided added validity to the study.

Finally, as suggested by Krefting (1990), after the interviews were completed, I gave the participants the opportunity to read through their transcribed interview to check for corrections, errors or possible misinterpretations. Only one of the participants exercised this option.

Protection of Human Subjects. As required by Northeastern University, to initiate research for this study, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board. All of the research I compiled adhered to and complied with regulations to protect the physical, emotional,
and social well-being of all participants. In preparation, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training course titled, “Protecting Human Research Participants.” I ensured that participants were advised of their right to end their participation in the study at any point and that they had signed a consent form outlining the details and scope of their participation prior to the beginning of the research.

**Risks.** There was little to no risk to the participant as a result of the research. However, participants did have the slight risk of discomfort while discussing personal information and experiences. The participants in this study were made aware of the minimal risks before signing the informed consent.

**Confidentiality.** My goal, as the researcher, was to keep all of the information and documentation pertaining to the study confidential. The interviews were transcribed through the online transcription service rev.com. To ensure confidentiality, I received a nondisclosure agreement and assigned pseudonyms to the participants and their respective schools. The audio files from the interviews were stored in a password-protected file in my computer. Once audio files were uploaded and saved on the computer and the transcriptions were complete, I deleted the audio files from the recording device. My journal and all handwritten notes associated with this research were kept in a locked safe in my home. All printed material related to the study will be kept in a locked safe and destroyed after five years. Finally, I used pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the participants, the schools in which they are employed, and the names of their colleagues. I kept the responses and information shared by the participants confidential.
Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

The purpose of the study was to understand the perspective of teachers that have experienced a shift in beliefs and assumptions and the potential impact this could have on teaching practices and ways of being. The goal was to investigate how a teacher’s engagement in a Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program could serve to interrupt deficit thinking and its impact on African American and Latino students in public schools. Examining the experiences of teachers that participated in the CPPD program was my vehicle to understanding the transformative changes that teachers had in the program.

This IPA study examined the experiences of five teachers that teach in a medium-sized high performing school in a Mid-Atlantic State. The teachers sat with me at a location of their choice and we had, what seemed to me, friendly and lighthearted conversations. The participants shared a variety of life stories that impacted them as people. They shared their experiences with microaggressions, racism, feeling isolated or ignored, interactions with colleagues, their students, and the cultural proficiency program. I took notes in my journal throughout the whole process to document both what the participants were saying and doing, as well as my own feelings and reactions. I found myself writing words that kept jumping out at me from each interview. Through the process of In Vivo coding, there were several words that were repeated and grabbed my attention from each interview such as: Dialogue, Awareness, Intent vs. Impact, and I Began. A deeper analysis provided the following themes: “Who Am I”: Life Experiences, “What I See”: Awareness, and “How I Behave”: Ways of Being. This chapter provides a detailed description of each participant.
Participant Profiles

**Shane.** Shane identifies as a White male and was 27 years old. He is single and has no children. He is a certified teacher and has been teaching for a total of five years. Shane teaches Reading Intervention in an urban middle school. Shane is an extremely funny guy and is very personable and easy to talk to. Shane was a work acquaintance and I consider him a friend. When I first met Shane he was struggling in the classroom and was placed on a Professional Learning Plan (PLP). As the Teacher Development Liaison (TDL) at the school, I worked with Shane to improve his practice and build his capacity with teaching African American males. The strategies I shared and modeled for Shane had great impact on his classroom teaching and environment and he wanted to know more. This year, Shane signed up for and completed the first level of cultural proficiency and was eager to share his experiences with me. We met at a Starbucks close to his grandmother’s house. His grandmother had not been doing well at the time and he wanted to visit her after our interview. It was a warm day and we sat outside and enjoyed a cup of coffee before the interview began. During the interview Shane discussed some things he felt ashamed to talk about and they were difficult for him to share with me. The first was about his experience in school. He didn’t feel he fit in. He went to a private school and felt that he was the “slacker” of the bunch, the funny guy, but not the smart one. Secondly, his family was not open-minded and he grew up hearing negative, racially charged comments in his household. It made him visibly uncomfortable to discuss this aspect of his life. Shane’s interview revealed aspects of his life I was not aware of. I enjoyed sitting and learning from him.

**Vanessa.** Vanessa identifies as a White Latina female and was 56 years old. She is married and has two adult children. She has been with the districts for three years and just received her professional status. Vanessa teaches Spanish in one of the district’s urban high
schools. Vanessa and I met at the Starbucks near her home. It was a very warm day so we sat inside, Vanessa brought a sweater because the A/C makes her cold. We moved our initial location to make sure that she was not sitting directly under the A/C. Vanessa is a mild-mannered and kind person. She has an inviting and friendly personality. She makes you feel comfortable being around her right away. She has a slight Spanish accent in her speaking voice and always has a smile on her face. When she talks she uses her hands and is very expressive with her face. She is comfortable with me because we are both language teachers in the county and we are familiar with each other. I do not know her personally and I have never worked with her. Vanessa has lived in many different places in Latin America. She spent her childhood moving around Latin America for her father’s job. She was born in Uruguay, and lived in Chile, Perú, and Venezuela before moving to the United States. Her travels have exposed her to many different people and cultures. She always attended international schools during her time abroad, her classes were conducted in English, and she had friends from all over the world. Vanessa feels this experience gave her respect and appreciation for different cultures. She has a good relationship with her colleagues and calls herself “the peacemaker” because nobody really gets along at her job. She has been in and out of the field of education since 1986, but always seems to come back to teaching. Vanessa feels that teaching is her calling and that the classroom is where she belongs. She started her career as Kindergarten teacher and left the position to work as an underwriter. She worked as an underwriter for three years and decided that she needed to be back in the classroom. She re-entered the teaching field as a middle school teacher in an urban middle school and worked there for 13 years. She left that middle school to raise her daughters and returned to teaching three years ago. Vanessa has participated in levels 1 and 2 of the CPPD program in the district.
Julie. Julie identifies as a White female and was 34 years old. She recently got married and has no children. She is an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher in one of the suburban schools in the district. She has been teaching for 11 years in the same district. Julie is a personable, no-nonsense type of girl. In her spare time Julie is an aspiring author of youth fiction. She is passionate about reading and writing books. Julie has a warm and inviting smile. She has a witty and sarcastic sense of humor and makes great references and analogies. She is easy to talk to and eager to share. I have a great relationship with Julie because she was my oldest son’s 7th grade ELA teacher and he absolutely loved her class. I also happened to be in the same level 1 CPPD program cohort as she and we got to share and get to know each other at a deeper level.

Julie and I met at a Middle Eastern café and shared a plate of delicious appetizers together. Julie was comfortable with me and she started discussing her life and experiences with me right away. Julie was raised Catholic in a fairly conservative family and lived in a suburban community. She attended school in one of the largest school systems in the country and was thankful for this because her parents had considered private school. Julie has been teaching for 11 years. She began her career as an English Language Arts teacher in one of the district’s urban middle schools and did not have a good experience with the administration at the school. She enjoyed her students and her colleagues at urban middle school but did not feel supported. She transitioned to one of the more district suburban schools and has been successful there with the support of the administrative team, but clashed ideologically with many of the staff members. Initially, Julie thought teaching was going to be something she did while working to be a full-time writer, however, Julie fell in love with the profession and feels a responsibility for and a
commitment to the students that she teaches. Julie has participated in all three levels of the CPPD program in the district.

Richard. Richard identifies as a Black male and was 33 years old. He is married and has two school-aged children. He is a certified teacher and has been teaching for ten years. He is a Reading Intervention teacher in an urban elementary school in the county. I met Richard at his local library and I was excited about his choice because I knew it was going to be a nice quiet environment for recording. Richard met me there after going for a run; he was a bit out of breath when he sat down. He drank some water and we started small talk. Richard is one of the participants I had never met and I wanted to take some time to get to know him. He seemed very familiar to me and I looked familiar to him. After discussing it for a minute, we realized that we had participated in the teacher panel for the Teacher of Color Recruitment Fair for the district. It was a small world moment. I got a very friendly vibe from Richard but he was not relaxed when we started the interview. After he shared all about growing up in the district where he teaches, and his positive and negative experiences as a student, Richard let his guard down and he relaxed. Richard was raised by a single mother in a high performing school district. His mother had to work two, and sometimes three, jobs to be able to afford the cost of living in the district, but she felt strongly about education and was willing to make the sacrifices. Richard felt a responsibility to be a good student because he was well aware of the sacrifices his mother was making for him. In this high performing school district, Richard was often one of the only students of color. He told me stories about a number of racist moments and microaggressions he experienced throughout his schooling on a daily basis. He shared a few stories that stuck with him, but it was evident that he experienced many. Richard had his first teacher of color in the 8th grade and it changed his life. His 8th grade English teacher was Latino and for the first time in his
educational career he felt important to a teacher. The teacher inspired Richard’s love of reading and his interest in becoming an educator. He still keeps in touch with this teacher because the teacher is an administrator in the district. Richard has participated in all three levels of the CPPD program in the district.

**Rosa.** Rosa identifies as an Afro-Latina and is 23 years old. She is single and has no children. She is a certified teacher and has been teaching for four years. She teaches upper level Spanish at an urban high school in the district. Rosa has a bubbly personality and a great smile. Rosa was my last interview because she was so difficult to schedule. She is a very involved and busy woman. She had recently returned from a trip abroad to Spain and had organized a trip to New York with students. She squeezed me into her schedule on a warm afternoon between packing and food shopping. I met her at her local Whole Foods cafe to do the interview. I was familiar with Rosa because we both teach Spanish in the county but we do not know each other well. I learned a lot about Rosa and I related to her very easily. I identify as an Afro-Latina and found that her story resonated for me. I connected to her story in a very different way than the other participants. I could see myself reflected in her stories. I jotted down that observation in my journal during my interview because it struck me. Rosa was raised by her Afro-Latina mother in an urban district situated about 40 minutes from where she currently teaches. Before she started school, she felt that being Black and speaking Spanish was normal until she started school. She was the only Black girl in the ESOL program and none of the kids that spoke Spanish looked like her and the kids that looked like her in the school didn’t speak Spanish. She felt out of place. At work, as a Spanish teacher, she continues to feel otherized by both some of her Latino students and some of her colleagues. Her Latino students don’t ever believe she is a native speaker and oftentimes try to “test” her Spanish. She does most of her collaborating with teachers outside of
her school because she does not have a good relationship with the other teachers at the school. She expressed that she doesn’t get along with them because they are not “about the kids.” Being a Black Latina heavily influenced her view of the world because she did not fit into a perfect category. Most people she interacted with expected her to be either Black or Latina, but not both. She struggled with this as she was constantly trying to define and redefine who she was and how she fit into society. Rosa has participated in levels 1 and 2 of the CPPD program in the district.

**Opening the Reflexivity Journal**

The in-depth interviews with my participants revealed experiences and information that captivated my attention and connected me to their life stories. They each discussed experiences that impacted their perception of the world. Although I was generally acquainted with some of my participants, I learned a lot more about them through their stories. I was moved by their experiences. I was not expecting the participants to open up so fully and willingly about some of their most sacred and difficult experiences. They talked to me about the difficulties they encountered, the growth they had made and the things that continued to plague them.

After each interview I sat with my journal to summarize my major takeaways from the interview. As I wrote and reflected, I was faced with a bias of mine. I did not expect my Black and Latino teachers to have experienced the perspective transformation as deeply as my White participants. I was wrong and I was taken aback by my assumption. After writing a summary of my initial reactions to each interview, I also noticed that in each of my interview summaries, one word or phrase emerged from the summary that resonated for each participant. For Shane it was “dialogue.” His experience talking to other participants that did not share his perspective or life experiences was invaluable to him. Richard kept mentioning the phrase “Intent vs. Impact” in his interview when referring to microaggressions, culturally insensitive comments, and the racist
behaviors he had encountered. He reflected on the impact of the behavior vs. the intent of the behavior. He finds that rather than get angry at people and lose his patience with them that he reflects on intent of the behavior vs. the impact, and he tries to help people see the impact of their words and actions. For Julie, her word was “awareness.” She felt that she could no longer see the world the same nor behave the same in it. She could not ignore her privilege, nor could she un-see when teaching practices were intentionally or unintentionally harming children. She felt she had to act and interrupt that behavior. Vanessa’s word was “otherized.” She was very aware that she did not represent what she said was the “typical” Latina, but she felt Latina. No one could tell she was Latina, even when they heard her talk with an accent, people asked her where she learned her Spanish. She was not comfortable with the label. She felt otherized and out of place. Finally, for Rosa, the phrase that surfaced during her interview was “who I see.” Rosa said she spent so much time worrying about who didn’t see her and her Blackness that she was blind to the journey of others and their struggle. She shared that she was able to “see” some of her students for the first time.

The journaling process allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the stories and experiences shared by the participants and it surfaced how I perceived the experiences of the participants. After journaling, I went through the transcripts again to code the language used and to determine the emerging themes of the study. As I coded each transcript, the words that surfaced during the journaling process continued to resonate for me. As I continued to code each transcript, the patterns in the experiences that shaped each teacher’s perspective became apparent. Each participant shared experiences that defined their perspective transformation. The similarities and patterns that emerged from comparing the experiences of each participant eventually evolved into the following themes of the study.
Theme 1 – “Who I Am”: Life Experiences

The Who I Am: Life Experiences theme emerged from the stories shared by the participants during the interview process. These stories painted a clear picture of the journey that led the participants to their current belief systems and the experiences that were the most important to them in their journey through life. They shared their encounters with racism, disenfranchisement, unjust social treatment, cultural blindness, and other key moments in their lives that shaped their knowledge and assumptions. Vanessa discusses how other’s assumptions of her impacted her, and continue to impact her:

Even the person that cuts my grass, he's from Mexico, Javier, he said, “Señora Campana, where did you learn to speak Spanish? You speak so well.” I’m like, “Javier, I am from Uruguay.” “You don’t look like us,” I’m like, how am I supposed to look? You know what I mean? So even within the Hispanic culture there is a lot of biases and blind spots. Vanessa rolled her eyes while telling me this story. It still bothers her. What bothers her the most is that other Latinos don’t acknowledge her Latinaness. Vanessa also shared a story about her first experience with racism in the United States. This is a life experience that made Vanessa aware that she did not belong:

So when I came here, I worked in Friends Church in a kind of, like, a little preschool. And that to me was, like, the first time I encountered, like, racism because I was Spanish and this is the situation. It was in an all-day preschool, so we would have, like, naptime. My assistant happened to be from Bolivia, so of course we would talk in Spanish to each other. So one afternoon the principal came and she told me that I was not allowed to speak Spanish in front of the children and that she didn’t want to see that again. And I was reading a book to the children and I said, “Okay, no problem, here’s the book, have a
nice life. Bye.” And I left and I never returned. And I’ve heard that two months later she was fired for being so ridiculous. I was not going to put up with it.

This experience resonates for Vanessa because she had never personally experienced prejudice. It made her feel like an outsider, isolated, excluded from the group. It made her sensitive to the experiences of her students. She is very aware of how she treats her students. She wants them to feel like they belong in her space. She is inclusive, she wants her students to feel valued by her in and out of school. She greets students at the door with a handshake or a hug, goes to their extracurricular activities, and buys students special gifts for special occasions. She attends almost all her students’ school functions. She is committed to making them feel special and cared for.

Richard’s experiences in school were the ones that resonated the loudest in his interview. It was evident that he never felt that he belonged in school. He was a good student who always felt he had to prove himself because his teachers made him feel undervalued and ignored. He felt that the only time he got attention from a teacher was negative attention or backhanded compliments. Richard shared multiple stories about his school experience that impacted him as a student. The microaggressions were prolific in his educational journey. He discusses an experience from elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. I highlight some of the most powerful:

Middle School: I remember my 8th grade social studies teacher. Again, I’m a political junkie, social activist. They were teaching the Civil War and one thing that I always remember from his class is, and I quote, “the Civil War is not about slavery.” He pounded that into us and he would look at me in the face every time he would say it. It was just, you know.
College: I had this one class. It was a math professor. God bless her. Intent versus impact. I was one assignment behind because I tend to digest a lot when I read. So I have to read and reread and reread. She had us read chapters and then write a summary or whatever. In a math class. I don’t even know what that was about. So I was one summary behind. I go to meet with her and it’s like, “Hey, can I just have an extension? I just need a few days to finish up.” “She said to me, ‘[Richard], why didn’t you go to Bowie or Morgan? They have teacher programs there.’” I said, “I went to [this] University because I got a full ride to [this] University.” That’s why I went, because I was accepted with Honors. She said, “Oh, okay, okay. Because I’ve often wondered why didn’t you just go to one of them other schools?” I said, “Thank you for your time and I’ll get the assignments when I get to you.”

After listening to some of Richard’s stories I understood why he was a bit tense when we first sat down. He did not trust me, and he did not know what my reactions and assumptions would be. He had built a guard to protect himself from the constant attack on him, his character, and his intelligence. He shared that he had similar experiences in all aspects of his life. He didn’t know a world that existed without him being intentionally or unintentionally disenfranchised.

As a Black Latina, Rosa has always been very aware of her blackness. Her blackness in relation to her ethnicity didn’t conflict with each other until she started school:

Being Black and speaking Spanish seemed to be something that went hand in hand. That made sense. It was very odd for me to go into ESOL and see that I was the only Black person in there speaking Spanish, and there were a lot of people that did not look like me speaking Spanish. That was weird and that the people that did look like me did not speak Spanish. That was very weird. I remember feeling like I didn’t quite fit in.
After finding her way and building a community with the other Latinos in her school she felt like she was part of the community; however, in the 6th grade she moved to the district where she presently teaches. She had to find herself all over again. She struggled with finding the meaning of culture and what it meant to be American:

And then I had a huge culture shift when I left the district and came to [this district]. And then suddenly I felt alone again, but in a different way. It was... I was the only person of color in my classroom at all. And I was being surrounded by a lot of White children, and a completely different culture, and one that felt very different than mine. So whereas I felt like I could kind of see myself in African American without the Latino part culture. And I could also see myself in my Honduran and Salvadorian classmates. I struggled to see myself in my White classmates when I moved to [this district], besides the fact that we were... That I was in a GT class and we all love school. So that was the thing, our commonality was we like school, but outside of the school building, I felt like there was nothing there. So I think I began to get confused again about what culture meant and how it differed, and what it meant to be American, I think changed for me because I understood myself as an American living in [my other district] and that’s what America looks like to me. And then I moved just a short distance away and America looked very different.

Rosa reflected on how the feeling of isolation in school influenced her decisions to teach, “I think that [the experiences in school] really impacted me and my career path early on, knowing that I probably wanted to go into education, but also just questioning how I could make children not feel like how I was feeling, very isolated. Different.”
Julie did not spend a lot of time discussing her childhood or her time in school. She mentioned that she went to a large school system and that she felt she lived a privileged life. She shared the story of her aunt coming out as transgender and that seeing her family go through a mind-set shift has informed her thinking and her behavior surrounding the LGBTQ community. Julie, however, did not go in depth about her uncle or how the family shifted. I asked her to but Julie focused her responses solely on her experiences teaching and on her experiences in the program. These were the ones that were important to her:

…reflecting back, beginning my teaching experience, it was a culture shock because I very much expected to teach students like myself, little White kids who loved Harry Potter in English class. And when I got to Cedar Lane I was suddenly, because I had been in GT classes my entire experience, I was good at English. And so to teach kids who English isn’t their strength was culture shock for me. It was, I don’t know what to do. So it made me much more aware of my privilege. But I couldn’t name it. Cultural proficiency training helped me put names to some of the things that I was going through that I didn’t understand and the challenges that I was facing in the classroom, as well as becoming a more effective communicator. So I would say up until cultural proficiency, up until teaching, I lived a pretty sheltered White-privileged life. And adapting to teaching and figuring out how to be an effective teacher.

Julie began her career in an urban middle school and it did not go well. She felt she had a good relationship with her kids, but her classroom was loud and active and the administration did not like her teaching style. She eventually left the school because she did not feel supported. She has been teaching at a suburban middle school in the district and feels that her administration has been very supportive of her teaching style. She compares both of her experiences:.
But I had some negative observation experiences where they would say because students aren’t silent in writing and seated that they aren’t showing respect towards me in the classroom and it’s my fault that I’m not a strong disciplinarian or I don’t have strong classroom management skills. So I was kind of at a loss a little bit because I felt like I was doing well in building relationships with the kids and I saw growth.

I saw kids who would come into my classroom and not even speak to me or want to be there to be very engaged in discussion and motivated and saying it was their favorite class, but I was getting mixed messages. And so when I got to Elegant Hills and I was still recognized as having strong relationships with students, but some of those management issues disappear because the student body was different. I got to kind of explore my strengths as a teacher a little bit more and kind of refine my teaching practices and that’s part of why I want to go back to a school like Cedar Lane and test that. I had much stronger relationships [with staff] at Cedar Lane. I was much more collaborative. Elegant Hills, I had to kind of find my way and that’s been more of a challenge because we butt heads ideologically sometimes because I’m a lot more student-centered.

Julie discussed her teaching, her teaching practices, her experiences with colleagues. The greatest and most meaningful impact of Julie’s experiences will be detailed in themes 3 and 4. It was evident that the urban school experience was traumatic for Julie and it did not sit well with her. She has changed many things about her teaching practice and would love to go back to her initial school to test her new teaching practices and ways of behaving. I believe this experience was meaningful for Julie because it was one of the first times that she had to face her privilege and areas of weakness.
Shane was one of the participants that touched upon some topics but did not go very deeply into them. I saw some hesitation in him going deeper and I felt that it was because he was still young in his journey to cultural proficiency. He was the only participant who had only completed level 1. However, he still touched upon race and his first years teaching; both of those topics made him uncomfortable in his interview. He expressed shame in having grown up in a family that clearly expressed racist sentiments:

My household environment and belief systems were not ones that I agree with now. My father. There were definitely conversations in my house about people and race that were not inclusive or accepting. If I hadn’t had some of the experiences I have had in teaching and working with all different kinds of students and teachers, I would’ve been down that path because I was indoctrinated into it, you know what I mean? Cultural proficiency let me see that, too; I was like wow, that’s crazy.

I could tell Shane wanted to say more about his household environment growing up but he couldn’t put all the words in the space. His facial expressions and body language filled in the blanks for the words that went unsaid. After doing level 1, Shane expressed that he wanted to practice some of the strategies with his family. He wanted to help interrupt their narrative but he still hasn’t mustered up the strength to do so.

The voices of the participants helped us understand the importance of the theme and why it emerged. Their voices helped us understand the impact of their life experiences. Each participant approached sharing their experiences and their life stories in completely different ways. Some brought us to their childhood, others to their schools, some to their homes, and some to their teaching practice. Each stop in the participant’s journey was a window into what has led them to make the decisions they make today.
Theme 2 – “What I See”: Awareness

The What I See: Awareness theme emerged from the realization of the participants that their way of interacting with the world, their reactions to the people around them were not the only way to see the world. The participants mostly discussed how their awareness developed as a result of the structures, activities, and engaging in conversation and reflection with other participants in the program.

Shane expressed that the most impactful part of the program was being able to engage in conversations with colleagues that provided a different view and perspective to situations that he was used to dealing with in the classroom. He stated that the activities made him understand the behavior of his Black students in a different ways. His conversation centered around horseplay in the classroom. A parent shared with him how normative the behavior is for African American boys and how intimidating it may be for White teachers. He began to question the way he saw and judged behaviors in the classroom and began to implement changes to reflect this new understanding. For example, he shared that instead of jumping to conclusions with his students, he would ask them first what was up, then he would talk to them about appropriate classroom behaviors and offer another outlet for the students to interact and collaborate without putting hands on each other. He learned to acknowledge students’ normative behavior and provide appropriate options for the classroom without being punitive. Shane changed his classroom routines to be more inclusive. He re-addressed norms after the cultural proficiency program to be inclusive of student wants and needs. He also was aware of his privilege and what it looked like and sounded like and it changed his interactions with his colleagues and the questions he would ask. He found that rather than agreeing with a colleague about the bad behavior of a student, he
began to ask questions like “is everything okay at home?”, “Have you asked the student if everything is okay?”, or “What do you think is the root cause?”

Julie discussed several experiences shifting her thinking and beliefs. She reflected:

So, I think my perspective has changed because I now understand the logic behind why some of that [conforming to other’s definition of good teaching] doesn’t work and I’m able to defend what I see [as] our best teaching practices to other adults. And I don’t think I was confident enough to do that prior to going through the cultural proficiency experience. I was not confident in my teaching because I’ve been told that that wasn’t what good teaching looked like.

Julie also shared her reaction to one of the activities she engaged in in the program that made her aware of the way the economic structure of our society benefits some and disenfranchises others. It made her question systems that she blindly followed:

… you eventually realize that it was ranked and one group just started with a lot less coinage or whatever. And then there was another group that had all the gold coins and then one group that was kind of in the middle. So, obviously, it simulated how it’s hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Culture’s ridiculous – and it was simulating upper class, middle class, lower class. But I think that experience really got me thinking about systems in a way I haven’t before and how the systems in place don’t serve every population equally. And that whenever I’m thinking about systems or frustrated with systems in place because my reaction in that game …I broke the rules and I stole from another group and, so, and I’m such a rule follower normally, but I was so frustrated with my inability to get ahead that I broke the rules. And so it made me see systems differently and I’m a little more rogue and willing to break rules because I see sometimes the
system’s not working. I see it as broken in a way I didn’t before. So, those kinds of experiences that are enough removed that it doesn’t feel real, but then after the fact when you start applying it to everyday life, it really gets your mind-set thinking differently.

Rosa also expressed her reaction to this activity. She was very frustrated by the result of the activity because she felt that the people in the group did not get it. She was frustrated that they felt it was just a game. She made the connection that it was a true reflection of the unfair and inequitable structure of our society but she felt that they had not made that connection:

I loved that game. I loved that game [but] I was bothered because I felt like we didn’t have enough deep discussion after the game for people, especially my White brothers and sisters, to understand what that game was really about. And once again, I felt like with just being one of the only minorities in the room, very soon into the game I understood exactly what the game was about. I was like, okay. And I’m looking around, I could tell they didn’t get it. Like, if they were just being competitive, if they felt like this was a game and I was thinking, no, this looks like my life. No, like the character you’re playing right now. That was me when I was a little girl. Like, you’re not getting it. So it was a lot of, like, those types of games, like the star game but maybe not enough discussion.

Julie and Rosa had different experiences with this activity and they both reacted passionately about it. Julie became aware of the existence of dominant social structures and Rosa was enraged that people didn’t understand what the activity represented. She wanted her colleagues to see it right away. Julie expressed that she reflected a lot about the activity and it impacted the way she approached rules and systems. Rosa started from the perspective of the disenfranchised and this activity reminded her of her life experiences and the difficulties of being
poor. Although Rosa was frustrated with some of the responses of the participants, she still saw its value:

…the star power activity, I thought was a helpful tool for me to take back and use when having these kinds of discussions with my students. And, also, I was thinking to myself, these are some professional development techniques that I think should be brought back to our staff. Because what I will say is that I understand that being in the training was voluntary. Nobody was forced to be. So every person that was in their space, in the room wanted to grow, and had a willingness to be vulnerable and be open. And I admired that. I think that that can be difficult.

Richard also had moment of awareness and how the program was able to facilitate this awareness:

I think what it was the eloquence in which they spoke to my experience. Like I had shared before, you spend so much time in spaces where people just don’t get it. Then to see *Breaking the Code* and *Race: An Illusion*, you’re like, “Yes. Yes. Finally.” And they’re saying it with research studies and... You can see the looks on other people’s faces who don’t have your same shared experience and they’re like, “Oh, okay. I got it.” You would have never been able to say it in a way that they would have gotten it. Right? So that, for me, is why it was so impactful. It even answered some questions that I had growing up. There’s this one scene where they talk about post-traumatic slave disorder and the idea of the slave mother who would kind of downplay the strengths of their children and for them to put it in that context, I was like, “Oh. That’s why my mother would... That’s why my grandmother would...” It’s not because they honestly did not see that I was gifted and I had... They’re just continuing a generational, you know. Because
they would be that one at the parent-teacher conference and the teacher’s like, “Oh my
gosh, Richard is so wonderful to have in classes.” “Really? My Richard? You mean my
Richard is... You should see him at home.” That’s how they would do. And now having
children myself has kind of caused me to be metacognitive of when I do it. When they get
their stars at daycare or they get their praises in public, I’m not so quick to be like, “Well,
you should have saw him when...”

Vanessa also had moments of awareness, although they were not as easily identifiable.
She didn’t know how to verbalize some of the sentiments behind her experiences and answered
very superficially even when I asked follow-up questions. She shared that the activities she
experienced in the program showed her something that she never gave much thought to. For
example, the activity about the socioeconomic structure of our society. She expressed her
surprise about the purpose of the program. “It was kind of showing privilege in society. So that
was kind of interesting. I was like, wow.”

All of the participants experienced a level of awareness that challenged their thinking and
had them critically reflect on their beliefs, interpretations, feelings, values, and ways of thinking,
or shifted their perspective about their established belief systems. Their awareness leads us to the
next theme.

**Theme 3 – “How I Behave”: Ways of Being**

The How I Behave: Ways of Being theme is closely related to each participant’s
experience with awareness. As the participants became more aware and their established belief
systems began to change, so did their ways of behaving. All of the participants highlighted
situations where they behaved differently because of their new frame of reference.
Julie described her shift from awareness to new ways of behaving. She began to think and act differently. She was committed to creating a more equitable access for her students:

I’ve always been someone who’s been served by the system that realizing the system doesn’t work for everyone was an aha moment for me. And it made me realize that part of my role as a teacher is to figure out how to make the system work for some of my kids whose needs aren’t met, [who] didn’t respect me, and I didn’t feel like I was failing my kids. So understanding that the system and what it was a part of was telling me I was wrong, it allowed me to say it was bullshit.

Julie also described how her new ways of behaving impacts the students in her classes:

I joined the textbook committee to try and get more books approved, but it’s a ridiculously impossible system to get books approved. It’s long and tedious and even if you recommend a book, there’s no guarantee it gets through. It takes three to five years to get into classrooms to be taught. So it’s slow and the system’s broken. But at Elegant Mills, me and a colleague mostly put together a grant through the district and got $7,000 worth of diverse books that are coming into classrooms next year because we went around the system, so these books can’t be explicitly taught by us, but we’re getting three copies of ten different books that fit the units, we’re teaching that kids can check out for independent reads that reflect our student population perfectly. We looked at and found books about Muslim students, we found books about LGBTQ students, African American students, we have hundreds of books showing up. But we had to go around the system to do that. And so that’s the kind of thing that I don’t think I would’ve tried. I would’ve just been like, “Oh, can’t teach those books?” But I went around it because I know that that’s going to have an impact and serve our students better than the curriculums currently
serving. So, those are the kinds of things that I wouldn’t have tried a long time ago. I just would have been following the rules and finding ways around it while still retaining my job and not getting fired.

Rosa’s awareness allowed her to “see” students she felt were invisible to her before the program. She explained that she had spent so much time thinking about her feelings of exclusion that she neglected to see the exclusion of students that weren’t like her. She was raised Christian and she had a fair amount of Muslim students in her classes. She tackled her blindness and took action:

But I recognized it. So, I started having conversations with my Muslim students that I never would have had before and I realized that there were a lot of things missing in our building for them. There were a lot of sacrifices that they were making that I felt were unfair sacrifices for kids to have to make. And I thought that this professional development community was the perfect place to open that up and have a conversation.

So we ended up, I ended up working towards having a space for prayer for the kids during Ramadan and then making that accommodation for them during class time and during their lunch time and then for after-school activities, and then expectations for homework and outside projects that went through our high school and all those through the feeder schools. And then I also emailed out to all the principals that showed up to listen to our projects. So that was nice. And that was big. And actually it ended up that it was such a big deal to the Muslim community that I didn’t even think… I felt like this was, it was a “duh, it should have been in place before.” I can’t believe, I didn’t know it was in place. Now we’re putting it in place, but it was such a big deal to them that they
ended up inviting us to our mosque, to their mosque, which once again made me realize there was this whole community of people that I really knew nothing about at all.

For Richard, his awareness led him to be purposeful about the way he interacted with people, their biases, and assumptions. He was able to redirect his energy from feeling frustrated with people to feeling empowered to shift the conversation or interrupt harmful behavior:

I think what did it for me was when I was confronted with difference for the first time while in the program. My 4th grade team wanted to alter how they teach slavery. The Richard before would have gone in guns blazing. “You White supremacists, what are you doing?” But it caused me to, when I went into that meeting, because they were like, “Richard, come in here. We want to talk about something with you.” “I was like, “Oh, okay.” They proceeded to explain how they wanted to take out the part about the middle passage because it was too graphic for the children and they don’t think that the children need to know that slavery was so horrific. It’s just good enough for them to just know that it happened. So it caused me to, instead of jumping to assumptions about them, I then checked my own biases and was like, “Okay, let’s start moving them along at their pace.”

[I] started asking questions like, “Well, what if the parents would be okay? Have we looked at sending a notice home? Just letting the parents know that this is what they’ll be going over and then we’ll take the parent feedback.” Making sure that we’re deflecting off of the fact that they wanted to do their thing, but giving them other alternatives and not jumping to conclusions about them and their character. Because for good, bad, and indifferent, that’s what they’ve learned. The impact, I’m more empathetic to other people’s experiences. I think one of my strengths has always been to walk in other people’s shoes, to individualize. But now it just kind of heightened that. It caused me to
be strategic in my boldness instead of being like a bull in a china shop, instead of
confronting in an aggressive manner, I’ve learned to be like, “Oh, they’re here on the
continuum. What can I do to move them here?” Maybe it’s not going to be a leap. Maybe
they’ll go from cultural destructiveness to blindness, but at least it’ll be a shift.

Shane and Vanessa were not as expressive about their new ways of behaving but they
both demonstrated a shift. Shane changed his classroom routines to be more inclusive. He re-
addressed norms after the cultural proficiency program to be inclusive of student wants and
needs. He also was aware of his privilege and what it looked like and sounded like and it
changed his interactions with his colleagues and the questions he would ask them regarding
student engagement and behavior. He became more comfortable asking his colleagues difficult
questions and interrupting conversations that spoke negatively of students. Vanessa was
impacted by a session in the program that addressed labels and the impact of not acknowledging
the preferred label of an LGBTQ student:

Well, I probably have gained some kind of affinity toward... and it made me more aware
of what exists, of the reality. And in many ways I would say it has helped me with my
relationship with the students…I was like, okay, I’m going to make a conscience effort of
respecting that new way of addressing students. Yeah. And actually it was my first, this
was so amazing. This year, it was my first year I had a transgender student who was a
woman before but now is that male, excellent Spanish student. Excellent. And I made an
effort to class not boys and girls. Or students. It was important.

The deliberate effort of the participants to change their former ways of being was a clear
indicator that transformative change or perspective shift had occurred. The teachers were
committed to the efforts of creating and participating in a more just and equitable society. This
new way of behaving was evident from the way the participants reacted and interacted with their colleagues, addressed students, and became more socially responsible teachers.

**Synthesis of Themes**

The themes in this study surfaced from experiences teachers shared in the interview process. They were reflective of the experiences that were the most impactful in setting the stage for and then facilitating a shift in perspective. The themes were a manifestation of the life experiences that impacted the participant’s frame of reference. They resonated in the stories that the participants chose to share and discuss in detail. There was a collective narrative of the participants on change and impact. They changed the way they saw the world, the way they interacted with each other, their students, their colleagues, family, and loved ones. They became aware of their blind spots and they took action; they became aware of their biases and assumptions and changed behavior, and practiced new ways of being and impacting change. The collective narrative is that without their experiences in the CPPD program, this perspective transformation would not have been possible. It facilitated their shift and gave them the tools to transform their actions. Mezirow (2002) argues that “Central to the goal of adult learning in a democratic society is the process of helping learners become more aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs, more critically reflective on their assumptions and those of others, more fully engaged in discourse and more effective in taking action on their reflective judgments” (p. 31). The experiences of my participants and the themes that resonated in this study are a clear manifestation of Mezirow’s argument.

**Revisiting Reflexivity**

I am thankful that I took time after each interview to write a reflection of my impression of the interview. I didn’t know it then, but that process became an invaluable piece of data in
identifying the themes of this study. My journal was able to provide me with some of the unspoken narrative of my participants – the story behind what was not mentioned. Many times it revealed the “why.” My study would not have been able to develop had I not kept my reflection journal. I also identified some of my biases through my reflections. I was definitely expecting the Latino and Black participants to not have experienced as much perspective shift and transformation but I was wrong. The participants’ experiences were equally as rich transformative experiences, they just took shape differently. I also caught myself making assumptions about my White Latina participant. I found I was not as sympathetic to her feelings of isolation. I noted that she had lived a privileged life as an international student and doubted the impact of her experiences. However, I did feel a connection with my Black Latina participant. I could relate to her. I realized that the assumption about my White Latina participant was not a reflection of her experiences and it could taint my analysis. I was glad I became aware of that before my analysis.

As a researcher, I was a bit frustrated with the learning curve that it takes to perfect this process. It wasn’t until I was almost done writing that I began to think about ways I could have improved the participant pool and data collection in the study. I plan to continue exploring the impact of the transformative learning process for educators. I am especially interested in continuing to understand how perspective shift can impact the outcomes of Black and Latino students in the classroom. There is an urgency in this work that cannot be fulfilled by just one study.

The outcome of this study was to find alternative solutions for the achievement disparities between African American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts. The goal was to look at effective practices that would help teachers create stream of
consciousness actions that would change their habits of behavior and improve their teaching practice. The data in this study provides a good launch pad for understanding how culturally proficient or culturally relevant professional development impacts teachers’ belief systems, as well as their ways of behaving both in the classroom and out. Below, I will discuss what culturally proficient professional development could mean for providing African American and Latino students with a more just and equitable education in public schools.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings and Implications

This study examined the experiences of five individuals who participated in at least one level of a Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program (CPPD). The life experiences of the teachers and the transformative learning that occurred as a result of the CPPD revealed significant findings. In continuation, I will discuss the themes that emerged in the study: “Who Am I”: Life Experiences; “What I See”: Awareness; and “How I Behave”: Ways of Being. I will also discuss the findings in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework. Furthermore, I will outline the implications for practice, provide recommendations for future research, and discuss the limitations of the study.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Although it has been established that all of the children in public schools, regardless of their family background, race, religion, and/or socioeconomic status, should have access to a just and equitable education, this is not the reality (Brown, 2005, p. 155). Our society and the systems of power that construct the dominant ideology in our schools continue to allow schools to systemically provide disproportionate, inequitable, and unfair opportunities to African American and Latino students. This system of oppression continues to place the blame for student failure primarily on students and their families and it allows the system to negate how their own policies and practices in schools have colluded to perpetuate academic failure for those students who differ from the majority (Nieto, 2000). The goal of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to provide a counterargument to the conventional wisdom that suggest that African American and Latino students underachieve in school because they lack the desire, the motivation, and the skills to be successful. A closer, more critical look at
this argument revealed that the lack of culturally relevant teacher training, school and classroom structures, the myth of meritocracy, deficit mindsets, and low expectations (Milner, 2017) are at the root of achievement disparities for African American and Latino students. In order to address this root cause, this study tried to better understand how providing public school teachers the opportunity to engage in culturally proficient professional development can impact the academic access and success of African American and Latino students. The hope is that through understanding how teachers experience transformative change, we will provide insight into how to prepare teachers to teach in diverse classroom environments.

**Review of Methodology**

This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) explored the experiences of teachers participating in a CPPD program. The study details how these experiences impacted the teacher’s previously unquestioned assumptions, the way they saw the world, and the way they interacted in it. Smith et al., (2009) suggest that the phenomenological and interpretative aspects of IPA allow for a detailed examination of the lived experiences of people and it enables the experience to be expressed naturally or in its own terms. Rather than having the experiences fit into predetermined category systems, IPA allows for some flexibility with the criteria for validity (p. 32).

The dissertation chair, Dr. Sankofa Waters, was instrumental in guiding the research process and ensuring the validity of this IPA study. As a new researcher, deciphering how to best represent the voice and experiences of the participants was not easy. In the first draft, the data analysis lacked the voice of the participants. My voice, as researcher, was also lost as I tried to discuss the themes that surfaced in the study. Dr. Sankofa Waters recommended that I re-examine into the data, and rethink the organization of the themes. The themes and sub-themes
didn’t truly reflect the experiences and voices of the participant, the data felt superficial. When I revisited the interviews, the summaries in my reflexivity journal, and focused on the experiences that were salient in the participant’s data, I was able to connect to the voices of the participants. Connecting to the depth of the participants’ experiences facilitated the interpretation and analysis of those experiences. IPAs promote this type of inductive procedure and focus on interpretation and meaning. In this study, interpreting the experiences of the participants and understanding the meaning of those experiences created a cohesive narrative that eventually surfaced the themes for the study.

**Research Question**

The following research question guided this study: What are the experiences of teachers who have participated in a cultural proficiency or culturally relevant training program?

**Discussion of Major Findings**

To explore the research question, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant, kept a reflexivity journal, and participated in levels 1 and 2 of the CPPD program. Each of these added to my understanding of how the CPPD program promotes perspective shift in teachers and the factors that impact transformative learning. A thorough exploration of the data revealed significant findings. First and foremost, the data suggests that the teachers that participated in the CPPD program experienced various levels of transformative learning. The transformative learning was facilitated by both the life experiences of the participants and the experiences of the participants in the CPPD program. Their meaningful experiences were categorized into three major themes. The themes were: “Who I Am”: Life Experiences; “What I See”: Awareness; and “How I Behave”: Ways of Being.
The themes from the study reflect the perspective shift that the teachers had after participating in the CPPD program. The teachers became critically reflective about: the way they view the world; their roles within our society; their previously unquestioned assumptions; and the way they behaved in the world. Secondly, as the themes developed, this study found that the more times the teacher engaged in the CPPD program, the deeper their transformation. The program offers three levels of engagement: Level 1: Awareness; Level 2: Application; and Level 3: Facilitation. The teachers that completed all three levels of the CPPD program, and those that worked on a level 2 project to apply culturally relevant practices in their school buildings, had significant changes. The perspective shift that teachers experienced was a shift, not only in their belief systems, and assumptions, but also in the way they implemented those changes into their daily lives. Lauren shared the impact of the program on her daily life “...so [the CPPD program] made me see systems differently and I’m a little more rogue and willing to break rules because I see sometimes the system’s not working. I see it as broken in a way I didn’t before.” The study also found that the structure of the program itself was impactful in changing the frames of reference and practices of the participants. The teachers’ experiences revealed that there were specific activities in the CPPD program that: made them examine their normative assumptions; reinforced the importance of community building; revealed the importance of self-reflection; and demonstrated the significance of sharing perspective and experiences with other participants.

Finally, the study found that the life experiences of the participant heavily impacted their transformative experiences. The Black teachers in the study were impacted differently than their White counterparts. To the Black participants, there were two components of the program that impacted them the most. First, belonging to and interacting with others in a space where their
feelings and experiences were validated, defined, and justified was a key component to their transformation. Richard felt that his way of being was both validated and strengthened:

My favorite is *Race: The Power of Illusion*. It’s one of my favorite movies. It’s one that I continually think about. During the awareness phase, another good movie they showed us, oh gosh, *Breaking the Code? Breaking the Code*. That brought me to tears. Like, “They were in my closet.” It was a really good movie.

The validation this participant experienced was one of the first times that his, and other participants like him in the CPPD program, had a voice that was not muted by the dominant social structure in a work setting. Secondly, the Black teachers felt that the CPPD program provided them with the language and framework to understand the actions and intent of others, to interrupt unhealthy actions, and to guide others toward a more culturally proficient way of being.

I’m more empathetic to other people’s experiences. I think one of my strengths has always been to walk in other people’s shoes, to individualize but now it’s just kind of heightened. It caused me to be strategic in my boldness instead of being like a bull in a china shop. Instead of confronting in an aggressive manner, I’ve learned to be more like, “oh, they’re here on the continuum, what can I do to move them here?” Maybe it’s not going to be a leap. Maybe they’ll go from cultural destructiveness to blindness, but at least it’ll be a shift.

The White teachers in the study had transformative experiences that made them culturally self-aware. These teachers gained a sense of who they were and where they fit into the dominant social construction. By engaging in the program, most of the White teachers became
aware of their privilege and how their privilege can impact how they teach their students. One of the participants shared that she finally understood why people who have been historically disenfranchised and discriminated against can’t just “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” The experience for these teachers centered around their understanding of their new perspective and how this new perspective impacted the way they saw and interacted with students, talked to other adults, and engaged with family and friends.

I think because I’ve always been someone who’s been served by the system, that realizing the system doesn’t work for everyone was an aha moment for me. And it made me realize that part of my role as a teacher is to figure out how to make the system work for some of my kids whose needs aren’t met…So, I think my perspective has changed because I now understand the logic behind why some of those [practices] don’t work and I’m able to defend what I see are our best teaching practices to other adults. And I don’t think I was confident enough to do that prior to going through the cultural proficiency experience. I was not confident in my teaching because I’ve been told that that wasn’t what good teaching looked like.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature Review**

The findings in this study are strongly connected with the literature presented in Chapter 2. The literature discusses the impact that deficit thinking has on the academic access and success of African American and Latino students and the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and the importance of reframing teacher belief systems. The findings of this study corroborate the claim that, to become a culturally relevant teacher or to dismantle deficit thinking, teachers must be given the opportunity to understand their belief systems and explore
the sociopolitical context that impact dominant ideologies (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Hinojosa & Mora, 2009; Gorski, 2010). The transformative experiences of the teachers in the CPPD program, not only changed the teacher perspective, it changed their behavior and their understanding of what teaching looks like. In continuation, I will highlight the connection between the experiences of the teachers and the literature in Chapter 2. I will frame the discussion using the themes of the study.

“Who I Am”: Life Experiences. The majority of the teachers that participated in the study attested that their life experiences directly influenced their purpose for teaching, the way they interacted with the students they taught, and their participation in the CPPD program. Some of the teachers expressed having difficulty teaching in urban schools before the CPPD program. They felt that their life’s experiences did not expose them to enough diversity in learning styles and cultural frames of reference to be able to understand the students in their classrooms. They could not connect to the student they were teaching. Hanushek (2002) suggests that teachers without the appropriate training to teach in diverse settings are not immune from the racial discourse that surrounds them. He suggests that this blindness results in the internalization of stereotypes that make their way into the classroom and impacts the way that teachers treat and interact with their students. The Black teachers in the study whose race and social class reflected that of their students didn’t have the same issue with stereotypes and deficit thinking in relation to their students. Their life experiences had prepared them to understand that they did not belong to the dominant social structure. These teachers’ experiences led them to encounter conflicts, not with their students, but with their colleagues. Their perception of their colleagues shifted as they began to engage in the CPPD program. Rather than judging the perspective of their colleagues, they were able to empathize with the perspective of their colleagues and, in turn, begin work
with them to deconstruct deficit paradigms. The experiences of all of the teachers in the program are reflected in the literature that discusses how deficit paradigms are engrained in the fiber of our social structure (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and in order to break free of the dominant structure, teachers must understand how their experiences impact their perception of the world (Henze, 1998).

“What I See”: Awareness. All of the teachers in the study shared that the program had given them a level of awareness that they didn’t have before. Teachers expressed increased awareness of the social structures of society, their role within those social structures, the language that is used to talk about students, the impact of race in our society, the historical disenfranchisement of African Americans, and the way they perceived the students they taught. One of the teachers in the study explained that he couldn’t see his students the same way anymore, that he had to structure his routines to be more inclusive of his student’s needs. One of the things he did in the classroom was reestablish classroom norms. This time he had the students participate and voice their opinions, he was no longer the sole purveyor of information in his classroom, everyone had a voice.

The importance of becoming aware of the dominant social structure and understanding how one contributes to that structure is necessary for teachers to engage in culturally responsive teaching. This theme resonated in the literature. Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as a means for discovering the full learning potential of diverse students. She argues that to do so teachers must “use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant” (p. 31). As suggested by Howard (2003), in order to gain that level of awareness teachers must reflect on their own racial and cultural identities and be able to understand how these identities
relate to the cultural composition of their students. The study revealed that as teachers became more aware, their practices began to change as well. Some of the teachers discovered the full learning potential of their students and understood their role as teachers. In one of the participant’s words they “saw the students” for the first time.

“How I Behave”: Ways of Being. After the teachers developed awareness of the social structures, and began to understand their perspectives, they became intentional about making connections with students and providing students more equitable access. One of the teachers felt that the system in the districts for getting books in the classroom, which reflected her student population, was too tedious and slow. She shared that the process could take up to five years from the application to seeing the books in the classroom. Rather than wait, she recruited a colleague to write a grant and was able to provide a library of diverse titles for her students the same year. She went around the system to provide her students with equitable reading materials. She shared that before the CPPD program, this was not an option she would have considered. This teacher’s experiences in the program shifted her behavior to be more culturally responsive to the needs of her students. There is a strong connection between this teacher’s experience and the literature about culturally responsive teaching. Griner and Steward (2012) identify one of the aspects of culturally responsive teaching as the incorporations of multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 589).

One of the teachers reflected about his role in society and his Whiteness. He was ashamed of some of his experiences growing up in a racist household. This awareness made him uncomfortable. He developed a broader sociopolitical consciousness by understanding that without intending to do so, he contributed to the culture of power in his classroom. He slowly began shifting the systems in his classroom. He gave the students more power to choose in the
classroom, he validated their opinions and moved away from punitive punishments. One of the classroom practices he implemented was the use of community circles every Friday. He wanted to get to know his students better and wanted to provide his students with opportunity to know each other better as well. This shift in teacher behavior is explained by Gay (2010) in the literature. She explains that this type of activity legitimizes student’s lived sociocultural realities and helps create a sense of belonging and acceptance for students.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The transformation of habits of mind and becoming critically aware of one’s premises are hallmark signs of transformative learning. The experiences of the participants in the CPPD program are reflective of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow (2000) posits that there are ten phases of transformative learning, and that those that experience transformative learning exhibit some variation of these phases: A disorienting dilemma; Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame; A critical assessment of assumptions; Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared; Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; Planning a course of action; Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans; Provisional trying of new roles; Building competence and self-confidence in new role and relationships; A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective. In continuation, I will discuss the phases of Mezirow’s transformative learning that were exhibited by participants in the CPPD program.

Phase 1: A disorienting dilemma. For some participants in the CPPD program, the participation of the program itself was the disorienting dilemma or a catalyst for questioning one’s meaning perspectives. For others, the disorienting dilemma was an activity within the program that made them critically reflect on their life’s experiences and their tacit assumptions
or being exposed to the role that Race plays in the development of the socioeconomic and political structures in our society. Mezirow (2000) explains that transforming habits of mind or ways of being can be epoch, all of a sudden, or incremental, involving a progressive series of transformation (p. 21). For some participants in the program, the impact of the experience that incited transformation was immediate. One of the participants shared that after taking part in an activity that demonstrated the importance of using the appropriate gender specifications, she immediately connected to, and understood, the experience. She shared that, although she had never given it much thought, she could identify with the idea of feeling left out, or excluded by others because of her identity. As a White Latina, she felt that she was often overlooked as a Latina or asked to verify her *Latinaness*. Her experiences of being otherized facilitated her connection to another manifestation of otherizing and facilitated the transformation of her point of view. She expressed her immediate course of action: “I’m going to make a conscience effort of respecting that new way of addressing my LGBT students.” She felt an immediate obligation to be inclusive of the LGBTQ student population in her school. Mezirow (2000) explains that this type or perspective change happens by trying on another’s point of view (p. 21).

**Phase 2: Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame.** Phase 2 was present in the transformation of all of the participants in the program. These feelings surfaced in many different ways. Some participants expressed shame about the frame of reference and the normative behavior and practices of family members and home culture. For one of the participants, his experiences in the CPPD program made him aware that his normative home culture was one where racist comments and sentiments were expressed. He also examined how his home environment had impacted his belief systems and his experiences teaching in diverse urban settings. When he first started teaching he had a difficult time connecting to his students
and building relationships with them. The experiences in the CPPD program helped him understand his tacit assumptions and allowed him to reflect on the impact of his assumptions. He also expressed fear about maneuvering his new frame of reference around the established belief system of his family. “My experiences at home did not necessarily prepare me for teaching in a diverse school setting…there were definitely conversations in my house about people and race that were not inclusive or accepting…I was indoctrinated into it [racism], you know what I mean?” This participant wants to challenge the established belief system within his family, but focused on changing his own ways of thinking and behaving in society first. Mezirow (2000) defines this type of behavior as developing a sense of agency. He argues that such agency “requires the ability and disposition to become critically reflective of one’s own assumptions as well as those of others, engage fully and freely in discourse to validate one’s beliefs, and effectively take reflective action to implement them” (p. 25).

**Phase 3: A critical assessment of assumptions.** Transformative Learning theory relies heavily on the belief that “transforming our epistemologies, liberating ourselves from that in which we are embedded…is the most powerful way to conceptualize the growth of the mind” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 25). The participants in the program tackled their assumptions, and their belief systems and practices. One of the Black participants in the program expressed his anger and discontent with his disenfranchisement both as a student in school as a child and young adult, and in his work context and society as an adult. As a child and young adult he felt vulnerable and invisible. As an adult, he felt strongly about pointing out the microaggression or racist manifestation of others, especially the behaviors of his colleagues. His experiences in the CPPD program allowed him to transform his assumptions about the intent versus the impact of the actions and words of his colleagues. He explained that his participation in the CPPD program
provided him with a framework for understanding the perspective and belief systems of his colleagues and intent of their actions. Rather than point out their racist or insensitive practices, he was able to interrupt the behavior and actions of his colleagues. He interrupted behavior by asking questions that would surface implicit bias, offering alternative language, reframing conversations to be more inclusive, and working with colleagues to understand the impact of their actions versus their intent. He found the CPPD program empowered him to tackle these situations with a higher possibility on changing the behavior of his colleagues. Before the CPPD program, he found that his colleagues would get offended by his approach and they would shut him out. This critical transformation of his point of view allowed the participant to become more tolerant or more accepting of his colleagues with different belief systems. He learned to meet them where they are. This participant’s critical assessment of his assumptions led him to understand his bias in the way he viewed groups other than his own.

**Phase 4: Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared.** Perhaps one of the most impactful parts of the CPPD program for participants was the structure of group collaboration. Participants engaged in the CPPD program in a cohort context. They experienced the program together from the beginning. Some participants shared that the comradery and trust that the cohort context created allowed them to feel comfortable talking about their experiences. The CPPD program had a built-in system of support for the participants to experience a collective group transformation. Kals and Elias (2000) argue that transformation is facilitated when the learner “is confronted by a complex cultural environment because effective engagement with the environment requires a change in the learner’s relationship to his or her or the group’s identity. In the CPPD program, the participants were exposed to a variety of lived experiences and perspectives. For one of the participants, the realization that other
participants were also questioning their belief systems was comforting. The participant shared that he felt supported by the other members of her cohort and by the facilitators and that this allowed her to ask questions without fear of being judged. For other participants the recognition that, although they were qualitatively different, the members of the group were able to listen to and learn from the experiences of the others was more impactful.

**Phase 5: Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.** Every participant in this study explored options for new roles, relationships and actions as a result of their experiences in the CPPD program. However, the participants did more than explore the options, they took immediate action. Thus, in this study many of the participants blended Phase 5 and Phase 8 of transformative learning. Some participants immediately began to change the way they interacted with their students. One participant stated that he went back to his classroom and began to reestablish norms that incorporated the voice of the students. Other participants were emboldened to take actions that would result in providing the students in their classroom access to books that reflected them as a population. One participant was deliberate about the way he addressed and talked to colleagues about students. Finally, one of the participants explained how her experiences in the CPPD program allowed her to begin defining herself as a student advocate for both students that were demographically similar and those that were not. Trying out or experimenting with new roles led the participants in the program to development of action steps toward a more permanent and consistent implementation of these roles.

**Phases 6 -8: Planning a course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan, and provisional trying of new roles.** Participants in this study simultaneously planned a course of action and acquired the knowledge to implement it through their experiences in the CPPD program. All but one of the participants worked on a project or
action plan that would allow them to take some of the cultural proficiency principles and their
ew frames of reference to other teachers in their school buildings. The project of one of the
participants began to develop as she was in Phase 5, exploring her new frame of reference or
role. Her experiences in the CPPD program increased her awareness about the needs of the
Muslim students in her classes. After making the commitment to build more meaningful
relationships with her students, she discovered that the needs of the Muslim students in her
classes were not being met. Her school building did not offer a designated prayer space for
Muslim students during Ramadan nor did they make accommodations for Muslim students with
extracurricular activities or homework assignments. Her action plan involved working with the
school administrators and other teachers to set up a space for students to pray comfortably during
Ramadan, she also reached out to principals at the feeder middle schools to promote the same
accommodations for the Muslim students at those schools. The Muslim community at the school
was extremely moved and was very grateful for all of her efforts. They invited her to the mosque
to honor her efforts and to thank her.

As part of her action steps, another teacher committed to leading professional learning for
the whole staff in her building. In her professional learning sessions she guided the staff through
some of the same processes and activities that she had engaged in as a participant of the CPPD
program. It was important to her to offer the experience to as many of her colleagues as possible.
She felt that the students at the school would greatly benefit from the staff’s participation in
cultural proficiency sessions. She felt that although her sessions did not shift the thinking of all
of her colleagues, it at least started the conversation. After her experiences in the CPPD program
this teacher also took action in the way she organized, planned, and taught her classes. She had
shifted her teaching philosophy. She shifted her behavior in the classroom from being the
purveyor of information to the classroom facilitator. As a facilitator, both she and the students have equal say and equal power in the class. The experiences of the participants are resonated in Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory. He argues that to change habits of mind the goal of adult education should seek “to help adults realize their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible, autonomous learners” (p. 30). The participants of the CPPD program made an action plan while participating in the CPPD program. In all but one case, the action plans were still being applied even after completion of the program.

**Phases 9 & 10: Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships and reintegrating new perspective into one’s life.** To continue their journey through the cultural proficiency continuum, two of the participants in the study continued on to the level 3. In level 3 of the CPPD program, teachers learn how to facilitate cultural proficiency professional development. In this level, teachers build the competence to lead others through the same type of transformative learning they experienced when participants. Participants of level 3 learn to facilitate in a safe cohort community. By this point, most of the participants have been engaging in the CPPD program for three years. Both of the participants that completed level 3 expressed a level of comfort they felt learning to facilitate in their cohorts. To build the confidence of the participants in facilitation, the participants were able to practice multiple scenarios and difficult conversations. Both participants were also able to take this practice back to their school buildings to continue gaining the confidence and capacity to facilitate. As Mezirow (2000) explains, these teachers reached the final phase of transformation. They had become “transformative learners, with social or organizational change as objectives.” These participants did not only seek to improve themselves as teachers and as people, they sought out others who share their insight to form cells of resistance to unexamined cultural norms in their
organizations, their communities, their families, and their political life; they became active agents of cultural change (p. 30).

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for various groups of educational practitioners including, teacher preparation programs, district and school administrators, district facilitators of professional learning, and urban and suburban teachers. This study could also have a state and national impact as a way of addressing the opportunity gap in public schools.

**Implications for practice in teacher preparation programs.**

Teacher preparation programs continue to struggle to prepare teachers to teach in today’s changing demographic landscape (Nieto, 2000). New teachers begin their internships with the intention of providing a good education to all of their students and helping students advance. However, according to Lambeth and Smith (2016), pre-service teachers and new teachers are often unprepared to teach in schools where the life experiences of the students are very different from their own. They argue that pre-service teachers are often unclear about “how to approach students from diverse backgrounds or they typically avoid discussions about culture, and race with students of color” (p. 46). Unfortunately, when teachers lack an understanding of the way their life experiences, culture, and race inform their belief system, they will continue to characterize African American and Latino students by their “deficits” rather than their strengths. In the case of this study, in-service teachers that participated in a culturally proficient or culturally relevant professional development program, explored their own beliefs and reflected on their biases. They also questioned their previously unquestioned assumptions through critical dialogue. These experiences were essential to transforming their ways of behaving in and out of the classrooms.
This study informs teacher preparation programs about the importance of having a program that:

- Hires culturally and linguistically diverse teachers;
- Hires well-trained culturally proficient or responsive educators;
- Incorporates a culturally relevant curriculum for all teachers (Lindsey et al., 2005);
- Provides teachers learning opportunities to deconstruct deficit paradigms (Ladson-Billings, 2007);
- Provides teachers with ways to explore their belief systems and opportunities to critically reflect on their assumptions (Nieto, 2010);
- Provides teachers with culturally responsive teaching strategies and gives teachers an opportunity to practice those strategies (Gay, 2010);
- Provides teachers with a network of teachers to share transformative learning experiences with and to reflect on learning experiences with;
- Works to increase diversity among teacher candidates to diversify the field;
- Emphasizes the importance of culture and building relationships on teaching and learning;
- Provides teachers with ongoing guidance and mentorship while learning new ways of being;
- Emphasizes the role that race and social class has on teaching practices and belief systems (Gorski, 2010).

These findings indicate that pre-service programs must commit to a culturally proficient or culturally relevant program of study. One that recruits both faculty and teachers of culturally and
linguistically diverse backgrounds and prepares its teachers by deconstructing deficit paradigms. Pre-service teachers need programs that will facilitate the exploration of tacit assumptions and personal belief systems and support teachers through the process of shifting belief systems. These experiences will help teachers connect to how their lived experiences can impact the way they teach and the way they see and treat the students and best prepare teachers to teach and service African American and Latino students.

**Implications for practice for district and school administrators.** It is important for both district and school administrators to understand the impact of the teacher experiences in the CPPD program. Teachers are experiencing perspective shift, and new ways of behaving as a result of their participation in the cultural proficiency program. It is important for district and school administrators to understand the strategies in place that facilitate transformative learning and perspective transformation. Having a strong understanding of how teachers transform their point of view would provide district and school administrators with the tools to facilitate this type of learning for more of their staff. Since district and school administrators set the tone and culture of a school, it is essential for them to model the following practices in their schools:

- Participate in culturally proficient or responsive professional development;
- Prioritize culturally proficient or responsive teaching in the schools (García & Guerra, 2004);
- Provide teachers with multiple opportunities to engage in culturally proficient or responsive teaching (Lindsey et al., 2005);
- Create a culture of inclusivity and high expectation;
- Celebrate the strengths of the students;
- Build teams of culturally responsive teachers and provide them with continuous coaching and/or training;
- Promote participation in the CPPD program or programs like it for teachers and staff;
- Assign culturally proficient mentors to new staff to help them understand the student population and the community;
- Engage in continuous dialogue about supporting the success of disenfranchised students;
- Support the development of awareness of implicit bias and personal belief systems (Ladson-Billings, 2009);
- Create professional learning communities focused around exploring how teacher belief systems impact the academic success of students;
- Build teacher capacity in culturally proficient or responsive teaching by having expert teachers provide cultural proficiency PD to colleagues (Pierre, 2014);
- Support culturally empowered critical thinking among staff and students;
- Promote a culture of inclusivity and belonging.

Implications for practice for facilitators of professional learning. District facilitators of professional learning should be aware of culturally proficient and responsive ways to engage their staff in professional learning. District level facilitators can improve teacher quality and improve student learning by providing teachers with the tools to successfully teach African American and Latino students and, as a result, impact the opportunity gap within the district. This study has implications for facilitators of professional learning in the district in that they should implement the following practices:

- Participate in all three levels of the CPPD program or programs like it;
- Learn the needs of the students in the various schools they support;
- Address the historical and sociopolitical context that impact student’s thinking and behavior (Ladson-Billings, 2009);
- Provide teachers with the tools and guidance to build meaningful relationships with students;
- Provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect about their teaching practice and share their experiences with colleagues (Nieto, 2010);
- Provide teacher trainings in a cohort format so that teachers build meaningful relationships with each other and share perspectives;
- Provide teachers with the opportunity to create action plans to implement culturally proficient or responsive strategies into their lessons (Lindsey et al., 2005);
- Co-plan with teachers to model culturally responsive lesson plans;
- Promote the importance of students’ cultural wealth by promoting the student voice and building relationships with students (Yosso, 2005).

**Implications for practice for urban and suburban teachers.** In our public schools the demographic gap between the teacher population and the student population continues to grow. “Specifically, the teacher population remains largely White and female…such ethnic differences, and the consequent mismatch in culturally influenced perceptions and behavioral expectations, among culturally and linguistically diverse students and White teachers often contribute to cultural dissonance” (Patton, 2011, p. 72) and negatively impact the academic success and access of African American and Latino students. The experiences of the participants in this study revealed that participation in a CPPD program can be the key to informing the culturally
influenced perceptions of teachers and deconstructing deficit paradigms. This study has implications for teachers not only teaching in urban schools, but suburban schools as well. To positively impact the student/teacher relationships, deficit paradigms, and meet the learning needs of students, the teachers should engage in the following practices:

- Seek out professional culturally proficiency or relevant professional learning (Cranton & King, 2003);
- Explore their belief systems (Ladson-Billings, 2007);
- Recognize and accept their own teacher culture;
- Explore the student’s prior knowledge, culture and life experiences (Delpit, 1988);
- Understand the relationship between race and class in their communities and how this impacts student learning outcomes;
- Understand the socio-emotional elements that impact student behaviors (Hinojosa & Mora, 2009);
- Seek out ways to build awareness to develop curricular resources and materials that reflect the experiences of the students in their classrooms or in society at large;
- Acknowledge their students’ cultural identities and their style of learning;
- Seek out and participate in activities that expose them to a larger cultural context;
- Commit to providing an equitable education for all students (Gay, 2010);
- Establish a collaborative learning environment for students;
- Involve parents and community members, and value their input;
• Engage in continuous discourse with other educators about just and equitable teaching practices, and meeting the needs of all students;
• Remain current in education practice;
• Strive to continuously work on overcoming stereotypes;
• Promote teaching as an option to diverse students;
• Work to promote the teaching profession in and out of the school setting.

Implications for practice at the state and national levels. This study informs the practice of national and state policymakers in that it provides insight into a solution that can impact the profound opportunity gaps and academic inequities that plague the American public school system. This study has revealed that providing teachers the opportunity to engage in transformative learning that builds awareness of their personal culture and identity, and provides participants with the opportunity to understand the knowledge, skills, and values that are associated with access to socioeconomic gains and personalized access to political power (Patton, 2011, p. 73) can greatly impact the way they view and interact with their students. In order for this type of professional development to become institutionalized and impact the success of African American and Latino students, as well as other disenfranchised groups, state and policymakers need to commit to the following to improve practice:

• Create explicit policy that promotes and supports the implementation of CPPD programs at the state and national levels (Ladson-Billings, 2009);
• Prioritize a culturally relevant curriculum in public schools (Gay, 2010);
• Design evaluation and accountability measures for public school districts to measure their implementation and impact of CPPD programs and culturally relevant curriculum;
- Eliminate a prescribed curriculum and allow teachers the autonomy to tailor their curriculum to reflect their student population;

- Use resources to promote the teaching profession and offer financial incentives to highly qualified candidates.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

The literature suggests that high performing suburban school districts are not immune from the challenges of providing equitable access to the students that they service. Noguera (2009) argues that “even in affluent suburban districts where resources are less of an issue, racialized patterns of achievement are often entrenched and reinforced by tracking systems that deny children of color access to honors and college track courses” (p. 63). To provide an alternative solution to the opportunity gap dilemma facing our schools, this research study investigated the experiences of teachers in a CPPD program in a high performing school district. The goal of the study was to examine how the learning experiences of teachers in the CPPD program facilitated a shift in belief system and perspective transformation. My belief that the CPPD programs facilitated transformative learning for the participants was confirmed by the participants’ responses in the interview. The teachers revealed that the program provided them with ample opportunity to reflect deeply on their assumptions and feelings regarding learning, teaching, and knowledge. The data suggest that the critical reflection of the participants in the program induced inquiry and a need to take action. The participants questioned their previous views, changed their approach to teaching, became empowered to support socially conscious teaching practices, and gained the skills necessary to facilitate culturally proficient professional development with their colleagues.
An area of research that would complete the data in this study would be an examination of the student experiences with the teachers that participated in the CPPD program. Having the student perspective would provide a clearer picture of the true impact of the transformative experiences of the teachers in the program. I would like to understand how the student experienced the perceived perspective shift of the teachers and the impact the perspective transformation had on the academic outcomes of African American, Latino, and other disenfranchised students. Understanding both the student and teacher experiences would provide a clearer picture of the impact a CPPD program could have in public schools across the nation. Finally, I would like to continue to add to the research about how to foster transformative learning experiences for in-service teachers by observing the classroom practices of teachers before and after they engage in a CPPD program and measuring the academic access and success of the students that they service.

**Limitations of Study**

As a novice researcher, I encountered various limitations with time, access to participants, and methodology. First, the school district where I was conducting the study approved the application to conduct research with the county in June, a few days before summer vacation. This posed a problem in the recruitment of teachers. I emailed about 200 possible participants with an attached learning activities survey. A total of five participants responded. After sending out the survey three more times, a total of 12 participants took the survey. Seven of those participants agreed to participate in the study. However, only five of those participants somewhat met the criteria for the study. While five participants were sufficient sampling for the study, the composition of the teacher participants may not have been representative of the other teachers or context within a larger network. Secondly,
because school was out for the summer, I had no access to student work, student-teacher interactions, or classroom instruction. I was not able to collect any observational data in the work context of the participants. This type of observational field data would have given the study a more complete understanding of the impact of the transformative experiences of teachers on teaching practice. While having no access did not impede me from following through with the requirements of the study, this obstacle limited the depth of my analysis and prevented me from collecting substantial evidence to triangulate the data. Therefore, I relied on the interviews and self-reported data, which may be a potential source of bias. Finally, the data gathered through the participant interviews was limited because of my inexperience with the interview process. Although, I conducted a pilot interview, it was not enough to gain the expertise to guide participants toward more in-depth and detailed responses. During the analysis of the transcripts, it became evident where I could have asked the participants to elaborate on their responses. Since the interview was the only avenue of inquiry for this study, the data was limited by my expertise as an interviewer.

Considering the limitations, I recommend that future studies with teachers as the focal point conduct their research while school is in session. The proper timing of the “call to participant” email would have produced a bigger participant pool, and garnered better results. Furthermore, conducting, the study during the school year would also allow for the ability to collect observational data in classrooms, evaluate the teacher’s work environment, and understand the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship in the classroom. For novice researchers conducting phenomenological studies or IPAs, I recommend that they take time to practice and understand the art of either the semi-structured interview or the in-depth interview. The more expertise one has as an interviewer, the better the data set will be (Seidman, 2013).
Conclusion

The research that informed this study supported the premise that teachers who engage in culturally responsive professional development may experience a shift in perspective or belief system. The participants in the program demonstrated shifts on sociocultural issues, recognizing and accepting their own culture, their relationship with students and colleagues, the way they approached instruction, and in the way they understood and connected to different cultural groups.

This type of training and experiences would be instrumental for teachers that teach African American and Latino students, as well as other disenfranchised students in both urban and suburban communities. According to Banks et al., (2001), “professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within U.S. society and the ways in which race ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behavior” (p. 197). Participation in professional development opportunities that help teachers positively influence the academic outcomes for multicultural learners would change the landscape of public education. Patton (2011) argues that when teachers engage in culturally proficient professional development they are more open to understanding and evaluating their own culture, commit to equity for all students, maintain high expectations for all students, develop strong relationships with their students, establish collaborative learning environments, and understand the sociopolitical issues that are rooted in the community and influence student learning (p. 73). In addition, this study revealed that participation in the CPPD program also provided teachers with the tools to: have difficult discussions about race and socioeconomic
class with their colleagues, interrupt deficit thinking, redirect unhealthy conversations about disenfranchised students, help other educators become more culturally aware and proficient.

This study revealed that CPPD programs are a powerful way to help teachers transform belief systems and become agents of change. CPPD programs or programs with the same goal can help address the underachievement differences of African American and Latino students by focusing on teacher efficacy. It is a way to shift the narrative from what the students are lacking, to how teachers can address the needs of all students. Rather than subjecting students to the deficit gaze of the dominant group, teachers who experience transformative change through CPPD programs can challenge the social structure by ensuring that students from diverse, racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups experience academic success (Banks et al., 2002). By deconstructing the deficit paradigms of teachers and empowering them to change their ways of being, CPPD programs can prepare teachers to foster a just and equitable learning environment for all of their students.
Appendices

Appendix A- Email to Participants

Hello Colleagues,

My name is Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly and I am a Doctoral student in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. As part of my current research I am conducting a survey and individual interviews with teachers who have participated in Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program.

This study is about the transformative learning of teachers that have participated in the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program. We believe that a shift in belief system or perspective transformation happens when adults engage in culturally proficient professional development and learn new ways of perceiving the world around them. We believe that this shift in perspective helps teachers understand how to interact with and teach students that are linguistically and culturally different than themselves. With your help, we can learn and understand this phenomenon further.

If you choose to participate, when answering the questions in the survey, it is important that you answer the questions based on your experiences as a participant in Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program. This survey only takes a short time to complete, and your responses will be anonymous, unless you provide your contact information, and confidential; data collected from the survey will be used to identify a possible participant pool for the study.

As participants, you are also invited to participate in follow-up interviews. Those who are interested should fill out the information on the last question of the survey so that I may contact you. Thank you for your time and your cooperation!! Your help is invaluable to my study! Click here to enter survey.

Sincerely,

Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly, ABD
College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University

*If you have any questions about this study, please contact me via email: nunez-donnelly.r@husky.neu.edu only. Emails to any other email address regarding this study must be deleted with no response per Northeastern University IRB.*
Appendix B- Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies, Education
Name of Investigators: Principal Investigator, Billye Sankofa Waters Ph.D., Student
Researcher, Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly
Title of Project: Teacher’s Transformative Learning Experiences in a Cultural
Proficiency Professional Development Program

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 that you have.
When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want 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 have participated in the [HCPSS] cultural proficiency program and have expressed that you
have experienced a shift in your belief system or perspective. This study is interested in
understanding how you experienced that perspective shift.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the transformative learning experiences of teachers
who have participated in the cultural proficiency program at [HCPSS]. The knowledge generated
in the study is expected to inform teachers, school districts, and policymakers about the
importance of providing teachers with the opportunity to understand their belief systems and
perspectives to positively impact the outcomes of African American and Latino students.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to participate in this study, we will ask you to participate in two 60-minute
interviews.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?

You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take
one hour. The interview will be scheduled between two and three days apart.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

I do not anticipate any risk in this study. If participant is uncomfortable talking about themselves,
the interview process may initially cause some discomfort.
Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help African American and Latino students in Howard County and across the nation gain access to a more just and equitable education.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. To maintain confidentiality, a pseudonym will be given to you in the study. Audio recordings will be stored in the researcher’s personal computer which is password protected. Audio Transcripts will also be stored in the researcher’s computer. Information will be stored for three years and then deleted and discarded.

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. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee Public School or as a participant in the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development Program.

Who can I contact if I have any questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Billye Sankofa Waters, Ph.D. the principal investigator. Email: b.sankofawaters@northeastern.edu. You can also contact Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly, the student researcher mainly responsible for the study. Email: nunez-donnelly.r@husky.neu.edu Phone: 978-809-8436

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, 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 be given a $20 gift card to Starbucks as soon as you complete the interview process.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There will be no cost to you for participating in the study.

I agree to take part of this research
_____________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part   Date
_____________________________________
Printed name of person above

_____________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent   Date

_____________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix C- Interview Protocol

**Purpose Statement:** The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study is to understand the transformative learning experiences of teachers who have participated in a cultural proficient or culturally relevant training program in a high performing school district. At this stage in the research, the teacher’s transformative learning will be defined as a perspective shift. Knowledge generated in the study is expected to inform school districts as well as policymakers about the importance of the transformative learning experiences that help teachers understand how deficit paradigms, privilege, and power impact the achievement of African American and Latino students in high performing school districts.

**Research Questions:**

What are the transformative learning experiences of teachers who have participated in a cultural proficiency training program?

**Introductory Protocol**

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about your experience in the cultural proficiency trainings offered in [location]. My research project focuses on the perspective and experiences of teachers that have gone through the training. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into the transformative learning and perspective shifting that can occur when teachers participate in the cultural proficiency professional development. Hopefully this will allow us to identify ways in which transformative learning and perspective shift in teachers can impact the academic and emotional success of African American and Latino students in high performing school districts.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, I assure you that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?
Appendix D- Interview Protocol Question

This interview should last about 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Background and context

1) Can you tell me about your life and your experiences up until your participation in the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program? Think about your life as a timeline from birth to present. (Think about your experiences with your family, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood, at work, etc.)

2) As a teacher, can you talk about your relationship with you students, the other faculty in your school, the administrators, the parents, and the wider community? Can you describe a typical day for you at your school?

Reflection on details of experience and Meaning

3) Can you describe a typical cultural proficiency professional development day? What activities did you participate in, how did you engage in those activities. Describe an activity, a reading, and experience that had an impact on you while participating in the program. Why do you feel it impacted you? What emotions did you experience and how did you express them?

4) You expressed that you experienced a change of perspective after participating in the cultural proficiency program. What made you aware of the change in perspective? What will you do differently because of this change?, How do you feel about the change in perspective?

5) Talk about your relationship with the other participants in the group, the facilitators, someone you connected with. What was important or significant to you about the relationship(s) you made in the program? Do you have any stories you can share that describe the way you have developed a sense of camaraderie with someone from the cultural proficiency program?

6) Given what you have said about your life and your experiences before you participated in the cultural proficiency program, and given what you have said about your daily work life, how do you understand the impact of the cultural proficiency program in your life?

7) Is there anything that you would like to share about your experience with the cultural proficiency program?

8) Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?
Appendix E- Unsigned Consent Form Attached to Learning Survey

Northeastern University, Department of: College and Professional Studies
Name of Investigator(s): Billye Sankofa Waters, Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly
Title of Project: Teacher’s Transformative Learning Experiences in a Cultural Proficiency Professional Development Program

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to understand the transformative learning experiences of teachers that have participated in the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program for Howard County Public Schools. This survey should take you about ten minutes to complete.

We are asking you to participate in this study because you are a current or former participant of the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the web-based online survey, you can stop at any time.

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. You may feel a little uncomfortable or uneasy about answering sensitive or personal survey questions.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, the information learned from this study may help African American and Latino students in Howard County and across the nation gain access to a more just and equitable education.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions regarding electronic privacy, please feel free to contact Mark Nardone, NU’s Director of Information Security via phone at 617-373-7901, or via email at privacy@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Billye Sankofa Waters, bsakofawaters@northeastern.edu Tel. 617-390-3852, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly nunez-donnelly.r@husky.neu.edu Tel: 978-809-8436 the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360
Appendix F- Learning Activities Survey (King, 2001)

Learning Activities Survey: Cultural Proficiency Professional Development Program

1. Since you began engaging in the Cultural Proficiency Program, do you think any of your ideas or points of view have changed? (Your ideas about your students, how to get along with other people, your own culture or other people’s culture may be topics of possible change.)
   - Yes
   - No

2. Please describe the change of idea or point of view.

3. Here is a list of the changes you may have experienced. Please check all that apply.
   - Something happened that made me think about the way I usually act.
   - Something happened that made me think about my ideas about social roles.
     (Examples of social roles include what a mother or father should do or how an adult child should act.)
   - As I thought about these things, I realized that I did not agree with my previous beliefs or ideas about social behavior any more.
   - Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or ideas about social behavior.
   - I realized that other people also think about their beliefs.
   - I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and social behavior.
   - I felt uncomfortable with traditional social behavior expectations.
   - I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.
   - I tried to think of a way to adopt these new ways of acting.
   - I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.
   - I began to think about the reactions and feedback from my new behavior.
   - I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.
   - I do not identify with any of the statements above.
4. What did your experience in the Cultural Proficiency Program have to do with your ideas or views changing?

5. Many things can influence a change of ideas or points of view. Please check off all of those that influenced your change.

Did class activities influence the change? (Check all that apply)
- Group discussions
- Readings
- Group activities
- Partner activities
- Personal reflection
- Video or movie
- Rubric or tool presented
- Other: ___________________________________________________________________

Did a person influence the change? (check all that apply)
- Another participant
- A friend
- The facilitator(s)
- Other: ______________________________________________________________

Did a significant change in your life influence the change? (check all that apply)
- Immigration
- Marriage
- Birth/adoption of a child
- Moving
- Divorce/Separation
- Death of a loved one
- Change of job
- Loss of job
- Retirement
- Other: __________________________________________________________________

6. Sex:
- Male
- Female
- Other: ___________________________________________________________________

7. Marital Status:
- Married
8. Race:
   - Single
   - Divorced/separated
   - Widowed

   - White
   - Black
   - Hispanic
   - Asian or Pacific Islander
   - Two or more races
   - Other: ____________________________________________________________

9. Country of origin:
   _________________________________________________________________

10. Length of time in this country: _________________________________________

11. Prior education:
   - None
   - Some elementary school
   - Some high school
   - High School diploma/GED
   - Some university
   - Associates degree
   - Bachelors degree
   - Masters degree
   - Doctorate
   - Other: ____________________________________________________________

12. What levels of the cultural proficiency program have you engaged in? (Check all that apply)
   - Level one- Awareness
   - Level two- Application
   - Level three- Facilitation
   - Other: ____________________________________________________________

13. What is your age? _________________________________________________

14. Do you have any additional comments to add about your experience with the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program?
Appendix G- Debriefing Statement

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation. Your participation was very valuable to achieve the goals of this study. For this study I asked you to participate in two in-depth 60-minute semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were framed around your experiences in the Cultural Proficiency Professional Development program at [HCPSS].

I am very grateful for your participation and contribution to this study. Understanding your transformative experiences will help researchers and other educators further the efforts of providing equitable education for African American and Latino students in high performing school districts. Your participation will also help deepen an understanding of the conditions, the experiences, and the activities that help facilitate perspective shift in a professional development program.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me via email: nunez-donnelly.r@husky.neu.edu only. Emails to any other email address regarding this study must be deleted with no response per Northeastern University IRB.

Thank You,

Rhoda Núñez-Donnelly, ABD
College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
References


Parsons, E. R. C. (2008). Positionality of African Americans and a theoretical accommodation of


