

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

TITLE: Experiencing Anti-Bias Professional Development: Reflections and Insights from a Community of Educators

AUTHOR(S): Chloe Medina

DATE OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE: 12/03/2020

THE THESIS HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Josie Jackson		Dec 4, 2020
COMMITTEE CHAIR	SIGNATURE	DATE

Shawn T. Loescher, Ed.D.		Dec 6, 2020
COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE

COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE

COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE

**Experiencing Anti-Bias Professional Development: Reflections and Insights from a  
Community of Educators**

Chloe Medina

School of Education, California State University San Marcos

EDAD 698C: Master's Culminating Experience

Dr. Josie Jackson

December 3, 2020

## Abstract

By way of qualitative data, the researcher looked at the experiences of a community of educators during a series of professional development offerings. The purpose of the sessions was to unpack the ways in which the intersectional identities of individual educators impact how they show up in their work and interact with students, families, and colleagues. Based on the premise that educator bias is a significant contributor to the widely documented opportunity and achievement gaps in education, the researcher sought to determine what might happen when educators explicitly take on those issues in the spirit of critical self-reflection. The specific question being considered was: In what ways might explicit professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? The scope of the research was confined to a select group of educators who work for one school system and attended the same professional development series. The intention was to determine how a diverse group of educators experience a specific professional development and make meaning of those experiences. As a result, the researcher was able to determine several themes that emerged from those experiences and make recommendations for how to move forward with effective learning opportunities for educators to promote equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. Adult Learning Theory, Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Cultural Proficiency are applied to the data to interpret the experiences and determine a path forward.

## Acknowledgements

My research has been about our identities and how they impact the ways we show up in our work. My primary identity, for the past almost twenty-five years, has been the identity of a mother. I am, above all else, the mom of two amazing young men. When the “wall of moms” began to emerge as a call to action against racial violence and injustice, I could relate to the desire to put my body between any threat and my children. By extension, I feel the motherly desire to show up for all people. I am who I am because Benjamin and Gabriel have taught me how to love unconditionally and made me better able to rise to the challenges of life, no matter how scary or unpredictable. I love them more than words can describe.

One of the things I share in common with the diverse group of folks I have the honor of calling my colleagues is a love for the television show *The Office*. My favorite moment from that show is the departing reflections of one of the main characters who notes, “The people you work with are, when you get down to it, your very best friends.” I am inspired and supported by the friends I have made at work in both San Francisco and San Diego (they know who they are). I have embarked on this current adventure of being both a student and educator with two amazing people, Roma and Mike, who know the struggle of balancing the demands of school, work, and parenthood. Our mutual support system has been crucial to my progress in this program. It was not easy, and would not have been possible, without them. Amy Poehler said, “Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you. Spend a lot of time with them and it will change your life.” Mike has changed my life. I strive to return the favor.

The people from whom I have learned the most are my students. They shaped my perspective and taught me why education is a life or death issue. I have been especially transformed by my time with Andre Minor, Travelle Johnson, Franceil Segi-Davis, Winston Joseph, Juandell

Joseph, Nick Troupe, Valentino Vaesau, Santiago Alvarez, Antanya Lovelace, Brian Penn, Jerry Mejia, Chris Curry, Ameer Acker, Gethsemane Pita, Victoria and her twin brothers Daniel and Danny Boy Nuualofa, Christopher Mountain, Elliott Ama, Afi Solomona, Semi Sione, Joe Gomez, Jeremiah Maua, C.J. Faataui, Hassan Travis, Malik Ngumezi, Quintrell Anderson, Andre White, Shamori Stewart, Albert Collins, Taisia Fauolo, Jonathan Green, Charles Duckworth, and Angel Moreno. What a blessing it has been to know these remarkable people.

Toriano Adger holds a special place in my heart. The story of his life and death is featured in the conclusion of this project. Lastly, there are two former students who I would now call family: Ropeti Faiva and Dominic Logan. They push me to always work against the school-to-prison pipeline. They are probably the two most loyal, brave, and kindhearted people I have ever known, and yet they are often looked at through a cultural lens shaped by stereotypes and understood to be menaces to society. They are not that. I will be eternally grateful that I know who they really are. What a privilege and inspiration to get to tell them I love them. I do this work because of them.

## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	2
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	3
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>Purpose of Study</b> .....	10
<b>Preview Literature</b> .....	12
<b>Preview Methodology</b> .....	13
<b>Significance of Study</b> .....	14
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	14
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b> .....	16
<b>Adult Learning Theory &amp; Professional Development</b> .....	18
<b>Implicit Bias: Contributions from the Field of Psychology</b> .....	24
<b>Critical Race Theory</b> .....	30
<b>Critically Relevant Pedagogy</b> .....	37
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	41
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology</b> .....	43
<b>Design</b> .....	43
<b>Participants</b> .....	45
<b>Setting</b> .....	45
<b>Instruments</b> .....	46
<b>Procedures</b> .....	46
<b>Analysis</b> .....	47
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	48
<b>Chapter 4: Results</b> .....	50
<b>Data Presentation</b> .....	51
<b>Interpretation</b> .....	59
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	60
<b>Chapter Five: Lessons Learned</b> .....	62
<b>Finding Summary</b> .....	63
<b>Finding Interpretation</b> .....	68
<b>Findings in Context</b> .....	69
<b>Implications</b> .....	71
<b>Limitations</b> .....	72

**Conclusion** ..... 73  
**References**..... 77

## Chapter One: Introduction

In a time of undeniable transition and transformation, as is this moment in 2020, our past challenges are colliding with and being compounded by new crises. Education was already in trouble in many ways prior to the mass school closures prompted by the spread of the novel coronavirus. Those closures, though, created new examples of what was already well documented. That is, underserved populations suffer the brunt of the hardship when resources are limited or when suffering is intensified by new factors. While leaders in education were already confronting achievement and opportunity gaps that have persisted through countless initiatives aimed at supporting equitable outcomes for all students, distance learning revealed new hurdles to bringing equity from the ideal to daily practice. Additionally, multiple instances of people of color being murdered by law enforcement or vigilantes stoked the fires of social protests, calling for a change to our culture that has sanctioned violence against communities of color and specifically Black people since even before the country gained its independence. Schools are situated at the crossroads of all of these transitional moments. Paulo Freire (1970), in the oft-cited *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pointed out that there can be no such thing as a neutral education because the process inevitably either supports the maintenance of the status quo or it seeks to challenge it.

Many scholars and practitioners have sought to determine why it is we have consistently failed to close achievement and opportunity gaps for our nation's students. Pedro Noguera and Jean Yonemura Wing (2006) have assembled notable work on this topic in *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools*. Despite varied and constant efforts, young people of color, especially male students, continue to be disciplined more harshly and more often than their peers (Noguera & Wing, 2006, p. 123). They are also overrepresented in Special

Education programs and underrepresented in advanced classes and programs (Banks, 2017). Black, Latinx, and Native American students regularly score below their white and Asian counterparts on standardized tests (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Additionally, a student's socioeconomic status is a key predictor of their future performance in school (American Psychological Association, 2017). What would it take to finally break free from these realities? While there have been instances of documented success in some pockets of practice, these efforts have not succeeded in widespread, scaleable improvements.

Because success in the quest to provide equitable resources, services, opportunities, and outcomes has not yet been achieved, educational practice must continue to be transformed. Looking at actions that might help move this effort forward is the primary motivation for this study. Specifically, the researcher is investigating what high leverage activities can be curated and facilitated by school leadership to move communities of educators closer to the goals of equitable education. Taking Freire (1970) as a starting point, activities crafted to increase equity cannot be neutral. The actions of school leadership must push on the status quo with an eye towards disrupting it. Likely, most educators would state they believe all students can learn and be successful. But for those on the ground working in schools, witnessing actions and comments made by school staff that reveal other belief systems lurking just below the surface is a frequent reality. These belief systems, sometimes residing at the subconscious level, may quietly yet profoundly undermine explicit equity work.

Several years ago, the researcher attended a week-long training for teams from local high schools in San Francisco to learn how to design meaningful group work as part of math instruction. One theme of the training was internal belief systems and who educators and students perceive to be “good at math” or not. A good deal of time was spent deconstructing

belief systems embedded in stereotypical thinking and reconstructing the team's image of mathematicians. After all the conversations and work on this subject, on the very last day of the training, a female math teacher stated, "Boys are just naturally better at math than girls." It appeared that many in the cohort were taken aback by this statement, especially in the context of the work the team had been doing over the week together. Importantly, it pointed to the entrenched nature of belief systems and the ways in which those systems creep into our practice despite explicit efforts to undo such beliefs. Here was a female educator who does math for a living stating males are inherently better at math. How might this show up in her daily practice as an educator? How might it impact student performance?

As a teacher in a Special Day Class in a high school in San Francisco, the researcher was speaking to a Black student about Geometry, and in preparation to give some advice about studying asked, "You know what you should do?" To this, the student replied, "Hang out with some Chinese kids?" This exchange moved the conversation from one about study skills to one about stereotypes, expectations, and academic performance. Sociologist Claude Steele presents a series of studies that speak to these issues in his book *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (2010). Steele argues that "to improve the achievement gaps that launched our research, as well as to know better how we all function, we [need] to better understand our social identities and how they work in our lives" (p. 61). This study is inspired by the coming together of a set of lived experiences, a belief in Steele's premise as quoted above, a desire to contribute to equitable educational practices, and a recognition that what we do for our students is not yet good enough.

### **Purpose of Study**

In order to achieve equity, much focus has been placed on ensuring that curriculum and instruction is culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2014). However, if an educator attempting to implement that curriculum lacks cultural proficiency, the efforts to bridge the various gaps may inevitably fall short (Lindsey et al., 2019). This mismatch between curriculum and educator beliefs is one plausible explanation for the durability of achievement gaps in the face of multiple initiatives to address and overcome them. The purpose of this study then is to contribute to the conversations regarding equity and improving student outcomes by adding something new regarding teacher belief systems and starting from the inside out. Before talking about lesson design and teaching strategies, what must educators know about themselves to be truly teaching for equitable outcomes? The specific research question is: In what ways might explicit Professional Development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators?

Several studies exist detailing the characteristics of educators who have experienced success with students in historically underserved schools and communities. One example of such a study was done by Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade over a three year period in Los Angeles. He published his results in 2007 in an article entitled “Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas: Defining, developing, and supporting effective teachers in urban schools.” As the result of extended time spent with a small cohort of successful teachers, he was able to isolate what he found to be five essential characteristics of the teachers he labeled “ridas,” those that “would sooner die than let their people down” and are “consistently successful with a broad range of students” (p. 623). Another, earlier study was done by Gloria Ladson-Billings who profiled eight teachers in her groundbreaking 1994 book *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*,

of which a second edition with updates and additions was released in 2009. Both studies are examples of work that seek to position Black students and students in historically underperforming schools as subjects (not objects) outside of a deficits model, which had defined much of the previous scholarship in the field. By analyzing successful teachers, other educators might learn how to replicate successful practices. This study aims to add another layer to that conversation, which includes taking a step back to before the teacher begins to interact with the students and asking what do teachers believe to be true about themselves, their students, and their purpose even before they make plans regarding instructional practice and relationship building. Specifically, the study will examine how self-awareness around issues of identity impact practice, digging into the ways an educator's individual configuration of social identities, and their awareness of those identities, positions them within their work.

One of the most absurd requests ever asked of students or teachers, or anyone who shows up in a shared space to engage in work (be it learning, teaching, or some other pursuit) is to leave your personal "stuff" at the door. This study contends that it is an impossibility to leave who we are at a door and engage in work as a neutral non-being. Rather, each student and each educator brings who they are and what they have lived into the space with them. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge individual identities and experiences, and contend with the ways they empower or restrict. Systems of oppression do not cease to exist because someone has asked others to abandon the personal in the name of working together as a collective. Power dynamics do not dissipate. These ever-present conditions must be acknowledged, and each person would do well to take stock of their position within those frameworks. This study will examine the impacts of an ongoing professional development series on facilitating conversations about these

topics and document the participants' experiences of the activities and subsequent reactions and reflections.

### **Preview Literature**

This project is situated at the intersection of several conversations regarding educational practice, identity, bias, and professional development. Work on culturally relevant or sustaining pedagogy is considered because the study investigates ways in which the identity and belief systems of the educator implementing the curriculum impacts the potential efficacy of the initiative. Therefore, key works in this conversation, especially the contributions of Gloria Ladson-Billings, are reviewed. The lens through which the formation and interaction of social identities are viewed is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT asserts the permanence of racism as a starting point. The researcher attempts to bring CRT into conversation with recent work done by psychologists on bias and the impact of implicit bias more specifically on education. Lastly, Adult Learning Theory speaks to the efficacy of various models of professional development.

In summary, literature was considered from the following themes and for the described purposes:

1. Adult Learning Theory for the planning, implementation, and reflection upon a specific professional development experience.
2. Bias work done in the field of psychology as the central topic for that professional development and for the consideration of the participants both during the experience and in the subsequent interviews.
3. Critical Race Theory, specifically as it has been deployed in educational studies, to situate a conversation about the deep roots of racism and racial disparities.

4. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as an ongoing conversation about best practices in the field of education when it comes to seeking equitable opportunities and outcomes for students.

### **Preview Methodology**

For this study, the researcher will collect qualitative data in the form of survey responses and interviews. The researcher will also be an active participant in and an organizer of the professional development experiences of the school staff who will complete the surveys and participate in the interviews. As a result, the researcher is positioned not as a third party observer, but rather as one who is interacting in this lived experience. For this reason, and for several others, this project will be a phenomenological study. More specifically, it will be a phenomenological hermeneutical approach. A phenomenological project centralizes the experience of the participants, which this study will do by reporting on their reflections provided to the researcher during the interview process. This is the most appropriate approach to take because the goal of the project is to reveal the lived experiences of the participants and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences and to acknowledge the variety of meanings that may be ascribed to a shared event or experience. Furthermore attention will be paid to how educators believe the experience will impact their practice moving forward. One such study that serves as a model for this approach was undertaken to explore the ethical thinking of nurses and doctors (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). They write of this methodological approach:

For research purposes lived experience has to be fixed in texts, which then always need interpretation. We do not believe in 'pure' phenomenology in which essences are seen intuitively, 'uncontaminated' by interpretation. Nor are we interested in 'pure' hermeneutics, i.e. in text interpretation that does not transcend the text meaning to reveal essential traits of our life world (147).

The group of educators being studied are employees of one charter school organization located in San Diego County which serves students from transitional kindergarten through 12th

grade. The group includes administrators, teachers, and support staff. While the entire staff of the organization will participate in these activities, a sample of those staff will be involved in this study, and asked during interviews and other reflective practices to surface their experiences, feelings, and built meaning in response to the material presented to them during this week. Participants are chosen as a representative sample, through a voluntary process, across a variety of differences including the identity markers (race, class, gender, age, etc.) that will be explicitly analyzed during the professional development experience.

### **Significance of Study**

As educators continue to pursue equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, considerations should be given to the beliefs and values individual educators bring with them to their work. While it is essential to promote cultural proficiency amongst school staff and to implement culturally relevant (or sustaining) pedagogy in classrooms, the way each educator shows up in their work may often be overlooked and may be contributing to the seeming inability to close the existing gaps. Therefore, this study offers the insights of educators who explicitly take on the topics of identity, bias, and critical reflection during an intensive professional development experience regarding the impact of that experience on their stance towards their work and on their planning for an upcoming school year. This study can be used to inform the planning of future professional development efforts aimed at preparing educators to recognize their own positionality and possible biases in preparation for committing to equity work.

### **Conclusion**

Equity continues to be an elusive goal for educators seeking to address the various gaps in our educational system. This study seeks to evaluate the role of the educator's individual identity on

their relationship to efforts to achieve equity, through a phenomenological hermeneutical analysis of a group of educators' experience in an intensive professional development series that explicitly examines identity, bias, and critical reflection. The goal of the study is to contribute to the conversations on surfacing bias in educational settings through targeted professional development in order to move us closer to equitable opportunities and outcomes for students. The driving question for this study is: In what ways might explicit professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? Chapter two will expand on the relationship of the study to the existing literature in several fields, as described above.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This year, 2020, owns a reputation for being an especially challenging year for many in the United States. Life as we know it has been shattered by the emergence of a global pandemic. Educators grappled with the challenges of suddenly moving to a distance learning model as brick and mortar schools were shuttered to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Site leaders were tasked with maintaining the trust and morale of staff as a primary task through this time. Layered on that, the Memorial Day murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer wrenched the world in another way. Many followed the news intently for the subsequent days. This was far from the first time the issue of state sanctioned violence against people of color was in the news, inspiring protests and calls for change. In fact, several other murders were also focal points for protest, and while they occurred prior to the death of George Floyd, his murder refocused attention on these cases as well. The murder of Broenna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky on March 13, 2020. The murder of Ahmaud Arbery on February 23, 2020. The murder of Elijah McClain in Aurora, Colorado on August 30, 2019. All resulting from violence at the hands of police officers. What followed was a summer of unrest, which has continued into the fall, and provides the current events context for this study.

The heightened racial tension and polarization of the country around issues of race and policing intimately interacts with the contents of the anti-bias professional development experienced by staff. Importantly, some have pointed to the role of education in maintaining systems of oppression and the obligations of educators to stand up.

Anthony Brown (2017) points out:

The notion of racial bias has received quite a bit of attention in recent public discourse. The death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and the subsequent deaths of black men and boys across the United States has catalyzed a public discussion about why police officers are

killing so many unarmed black citizens. The question scholars, journalists, and activists are pursuing is whether some internal impulse is causing law enforcement officers to react to black males with deadly violence. However this is not a concern within law enforcement alone; many education scholars... have addressed bias in the ways teachers make decisions about black males in school settings, which has been a concern for quite some time (p. 4).

To respond to this concern, many educators have been actively engaged in efforts to increase equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. California, for example, is home to several organizations engaged in this work, including the National Equity Project, Community Responsive Education, and the San Francisco Coalition for Essential Small Schools. Resources and practitioners from each of these organizations will be cited throughout the study and have been relied upon for creating the professional development experience that will serve as the core of the study, which seeks to answer the following question: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators?

This study is situated at the intersection of several current conversations in the field of education and psychology. Adult Learning Theory illuminates the potential efficacy of professional development and myriad ways educators might engage with their experiences in the series. The field of psychology offers extensive insight into bias and provides studies that reveal how bias operates within individuals. Critical Race Theory (CRT) originates in the field of legal studies but has been picked up and expanded upon by educators to analyze both structures and interpersonal interactions. Lastly, the collection of work regarding Critically Relevant Pedagogy (or Critically Sustaining Pedagogy) offers examples of work that is already being done to increase equity in education with attention to the identities of students. This study hopes to contribute to existing scholarship and practice by tying together parallel conversations.

Additionally, by bringing together these threads, this study may hopefully add a new layer to the

conversation regarding requisite teacher preparation to effectively meet the challenges of persistent inequitable opportunities and outcomes for students.

### **Adult Learning Theory & Professional Development**

For the purposes of this study, understanding how adults learn is foundational to answering the research question regarding the experience of adult learners (teachers themselves) in a professional development series that is specifically focused on anti-bias work. Because of the subject matter of the learning opportunities, Paulo Freire (1970), bell hooks (1994, 2003, 2010), and Jane Vella (1994) offer relevant observations regarding the ways and reasons adults learn. For more general theories of adult learning and reflections on how to assess the learning of teachers during and after professional development, the work of Malcolm Knowles (1980, 2015), David Kolb (2015), Jack Mezirow (2009), is considered, with special attention to the ways in which their ideas are applied to the context of the school and to supporting the learning and development of teachers as described by Elena Aguilar (2016).

Paulo Freire developed the model of problem-posing education in opposition to what he called the banking model of education. In the banking model, students are understood as empty vessels into which the teacher deposits knowledge:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat ... They do, it is true, have the opportunity to to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.” (p. 72)

Freire noted the similarities between this unequal and disempowering dynamic and the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressor in society as a whole (p. 73). While working as an educator within adult literacy programs, he was able to conceptualize an

understanding of education for liberation that held teacher and student as equals, engaged in dialogue. Dialogue, for Freire, required solidarity, a relationship of equals, and mutual respect. This creates education that is an act of love, leading to liberation. It is inspired by earlier theorists like Piaget and Dewey within the constructivist school, who believed that individuals build meaning through their own experiences. Freire states, “Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation” (p. 86). When Freire’s model of pedagogy is compared with the aims of anti-bias professional development, there is a complex overlap. Freire offers both a way to think about teaching the material to the participants and a reason for the participants to learn the material, so that they might recognize their role as educators who perpetuate systems of oppression or educators who foster the conditions for liberation.

Dialogue as an exchange between equals is a theme of adult learning that can also be found in the works of bell hooks, who repeatedly asserts her descentance from Friere as a theoretician of education as practice. Teaching adults in the context of higher education, hooks examines the ways the “seriousness” of the institution stifled the excitement of learning: “excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals... and interacted with according to their need” (p. 7). Here, hooks describes a classroom scene that can easily be connected to the principles put forth by fellow scholars of adult learning.

One such scholar is Jane Vella who centralizes dialogue as the process by which adults learn. Just as Freire theorized the relationship of the teacher and student or teacher-student and students-teachers as a reciprocal one where both are doing the learning and teaching, Vella

believes in an exchange of ideas as the central component of adult learning. Vella (2016) states that adults “learn best when they are in dialogue, when they are engaged, when they are the subjects (that is the decision-makers) of the meaning of learning” (p. 96). In her earlier work, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* (1994), she lays out 12 principles or prerequisites for successful adult learning. These include conducting a needs assessment that drives planning of the learning, creating safety and sound relationships for learning, creating reinforcement for what is learned, pairing action and time for reflection, teaching what is useful, ensuring that learning is an active process involving collaboration, and determining a process for accountability. In addition, she lays out the design steps for creating the learning experience. These structures are a result of her examination of how adults learn over years.

Some of Vella’s principles are similar to the work of Malcolm Knowles. There are also connections to be made with Freire’s work. Perhaps the most prominent of theories when it comes to the process of adult learning is andragogy, as theorized by Malcom Knowles who, in 1973, proposed the first four principles of adult learning (self-concept, experience, readiness, and orientation) that would become part of a larger and developing theoretical framework that would grow to include several additional principles (2015).

As stated above, in much of the work on adult learning, Malcolm Knowles is cited as a critical contributor to the field. In *The Art of Coaching Teams*, Elena Aguilar (2016) builds on his work with critical observations and additions. Of Knowles, she writes:

Knowles’s work is useful, but his ideas are really just basic good practices for teaching people of all ages. Furthermore, many of his assumptions are culturally bound: they may not be relevant among adults of different cultures, some are male-centric, and some do not take into account generational differences, which are becoming more accentuated. Furthermore, Knowles’s assumptions exist in a vacuum of power. Without considering the power structures in which learning occurs, our understandings may be shortsighted and our actions may have limited impact. With these caveats, Knowles’s work is helpful and greatly informs the principles of adult learning (p. 188).

After offering this complication or “caveat” to the work done by Knowles, Aguilar lays out seven principles of adult learning:

- Safety is the first, which “compels us to consider power dynamics in a team to evaluate psychological safety levels” (p. 189);
- Previous experiences with learning should be acknowledged and valued;
- Surface the why: “Many adult learners commit to learning when we believe that the objectives are realistic and important for our personal growth” (p. 191);
- Adults are looking to have some control over what and how they learn;
- Learning is internalized through practice;
- Trainings are best grasped when they are organized to solve problems;
- Adult learners want to learn (so if it doesn’t appear to be the case, investigate the block).

Aguilar includes a consideration of the work of Lev Vygotsky and the concept of the zone of proximal development or ZPD (p. 195). One challenge to consider for professional development, especially with large groups, as is the case with the subject of this study, is that members of the group may be in very different places with the content which means their ZPDs are not the same. The facilitator must take that into consideration, and it may impact the individual’s experience with the training.

Other theories considered include transformative learning as theorized by Jack Mezirow (2009) and experiential learning as theorized by David Kolb (1980). Kolb’s experiential learning theory posits four steps to learning: concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. For Kolb, learning is an endless cycle of these four steps. And, learning only occurs when the learner is able to apply information to actual situations of the context of real life. For Mezirow, learning happens in three steps, the

identification of a dilemma, the establishment of personal relevance, and opportunities for critical thinking. Mezirow believes that new learning happens when it is connected to a previous experience and Kolb focuses on new learning happening when knowledge and skills are applied in real life. Taken together, a productive climate for adult learning might include the recognition of previous experiences as a starting point and the opportunities to apply what is newly learned as part of the learning process. When engaging in anti-bias professional development, it is quite easy to connect to personal experiences since it is those very experiences that have contributed to shaping each educator's biases. The challenge is to make a safe space to engage in that reflection and connection, and then to offer new information in a way that validates the learner as autonomous and equal to the teacher, provides a rationale to the learning that suggests it will be immediately useful for the teacher, and creates opportunities for real world application.

Several books and articles address efforts to support teachers (and others in similar contexts) in unpacking their own identities, beliefs, and biases as well as contending with the realities of entrenched racism. Such professional development should begin with teachers' internal belief systems rather than their practices (von Frank, 2010). While it is important to include activities that look at data with an emphasis on critically analyzing inequities, the lens through which each educator is looking through should first be examined. When this is not done, the perspective brought to the task, which may be evidenced in the language used to discuss the data, may unwittingly perpetuate the exact inequities groups of educators seek to address. Bringing educators' attention to their word choice and framing of scenarios can be done through a framework of Discourse I and Discourse II (Eubanks et al., 1997). "[G]etting at the substance of systemic or cultural change requires demystifying the hegemonic cultures." (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 2). Discourse I is the language used in school to perpetuate current social orders and

systems of oppression. This is also referred to as hegemonic discourse. Discourse II is the alternative proposed to create an environment in schools that is a liberatory space with more equitable outcomes. Realizing the subjectivity of language is one piece of the puzzle when considering identity, bias, and critical self-reflection. “We must learn to ask different questions and to question everything we do in schools from a perspective of effects and consequences” (p. 7).

In addition to a consideration of language, existing frameworks for promoting effective teaching in underserved communities are considered (Maloney et al., 2019). One such model with four core principles is built on an acceptance of culturally relevant pedagogy as promising practice. After engaging in studies in each of their distinct educational environments, Maloney et al. conclude that teaching must be culturally relevant, collective, intergenerational, and co-created. They are explicitly attempting to offer a pedagogy that runs counter to the neoliberal agenda of accountability. They state:

The context of teacher education in the U.S. and abroad is now part of a neoliberal project to privatize and corporatize education that has exacerbated existing school disparities rooted in settler colonial logic, white racial domination, classism, sexism, ableism, to name but a few. In contrast to neoliberal efforts, transformative, social justice-oriented educators posit that education should be humanizing and liberating, schools can and should be sites of progressive thinking and social change, and teaching and learning are never neutral (p. 253).

Considering how adults learn must be complicated by an analysis of what they are learning and what meanings they are taking away with them when evaluating the potential of professional development for educators as potentially contributing to improving opportunities and outcomes for historically underserved students. This project must include systems thinking, collaboration across contexts, and the acceptance that it will take time. Myles Horton, is an example of a lifelong social justice educator, whose autobiography is appropriately entitled *The Long Haul*

(1998) about the Highlander Folk School and the transformative work done there beginning in 1930. Of note here is the commitment to radical change through education must unfold gradually over time. This is a cautionary premise because much of what is put forth as professional development is prioritized for very short cycles, until the next idea takes the stage.

For this study, the scholarship regarding how adults learn, existing effective models for teacher education and professional development, and the scale and scope of these efforts in promoting equitable opportunities and outcomes for students is a key consideration when teachers' experiences of professional development are shared and evaluated. Were the proper conditions for adult learning present throughout the professional development series? Will the learning be ongoing with opportunities to reflect and apply new knowledge and skills? If optimal conditions are created, they may be pointed to as an example of anti-bias work in actions which is the goal of the professional development series, an opportunity to show and not tell. Another link to be found is the science of how adults learn and the science of bias.

### **Implicit Bias: Contributions from the Field of Psychology**

As noted earlier in this work, there is much available evidence of disproportionality in schools, and arguments made that a reason for this disproportionality is bias on the part of school staff. Specifically, report after report has shown that black students, especially males, are much more likely to be referred for Special Education, excluded from gifted programs, and disciplined more harshly (suspended or expelled) than other students. Pedro Noguera is one education scholar who has worked extensively in this area. For example, his book *The Trouble with Black Boys* (2008) explores these issues in depth. The data has been presented and analyzed regarding disproportionality yet scalable gains towards closing the gaps in education remain elusive.

Helpfully, work has emerged from the field of psychology, demonstrating the ways in which bias is perpetuated through implicit knowledge and subtle messaging. The current scholarship on bias has implications for professional development and teacher education in general. What does the work say causes bias to persist among educators, even when it is acknowledged that it is detrimental to achieving the goal of equitable education? And, how might the existing work on bias enable the creation of meaningful professional development plans that can directly take on bias in new and more profoundly deconstructive ways?

Phillip Atiba Goff is a psychologist who works on issues of racial bias and intersectionality especially in relationship to policing practices. He is also the co-founder of the Center for Policing Equity. He makes a contribution to the understanding of the process of dehumanization, which is directly relevant to an analysis of schooling, acknowledging the parallels between law enforcement and school structures. Goff enters a conversation about dehumanization that he points out has been largely descriptive and the terrain of historians, linguists, and philosophers. He and his psychologist counterparts offer empirical studies to the mix, including neurological studies to illustrate the biological processes involved in dehumanization. Goff takes the work already done in psychology further by connecting it to cultural representations and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, he describes the Black-ape association and its long and continuing history in American culture. He also investigates the ways in which these associations contribute to disparate outcomes for Black suspects in the criminal justice systems (Goff et al., 2008b). There can and should be a line drawn from his work to work in education, noting that dehumanization can be connected to behaviors that result in the disparate outcomes for students in school. In concluding a set of 6 studies, Goff et al. argue, “Dehumanization is a method by

which individuals and social groups are targeted for cruelty, social degradation, and state-sanctioned violence” (p. 305).

The processes of dehumanizing groups of people and the proliferation of stereotypes go hand in hand. In the book *Whistling Vivaldi* (2010) Claude Steele explains what he has defined as “stereotype threat.” This work is significant for what it says about student performance in the face of an awareness of existing stereotypes. Several studies contained in this work demonstrate the impact on outcomes for individuals when they are aware they are acting in a situation that may confirm a negative stereotype about their identity group. Steele describes stereotypes as always all around us, “floating in the air like a cloud gathering the nation’s history” (p. 7). In concluding his work, Steele states, “a central policy implication for the research discussed here is that unless you make people feel safe from the risk of these identity predicaments in identity-integrated settings, you won’t succeed in reducing group achievement gaps or in enabling people from different backgrounds to work comfortably and well together” (p. 215). In relationship to professional development for educators, the usefulness of this study is twofold. First is one of his concluding points regarding the necessity of surfacing our identities and contending with them honestly, rather than dodging these conversations under the pretense that ignoring identity might somehow move us closer to a postracial or otherwise equitable world. Steele advocates for using our own multiple identities as a bridge. This stance will be taken in developing the plan for working with school staff and creating a safe setting for them. Second is the realization that not only must educators contend with their own identities and biases, but must also be cognizant of the “stereotype threats” confronting students that exist regardless of the educator’s individual practice.

In “The Space Between Us: Stereotype Threat and Distance in Interracial Contexts” (Goff, P. et al., 2008) questions about the persistence of racial inequality at the same time as there has been a documented decline in the expression of anti-Black prejudice are addressed. Applying the idea of stereotype threat, as described above, the authors find that the potential of being perceived as racist causes white folks to distance themselves from interracial conversations. However, when the conversations are previewed as opportunities to learn, white folks were more likely to participate actively. Specifically for this study, there are implications for considering how conversations and learning opportunities will be framed within the professional development space. Both how adults learn, as addressed in the earlier section, and how adult learners may respond to the specifics of conversations about identity that include a focus on race and privilege, will be considered.

Brain science reveals that “bits of knowledge are stored in our brains because we encounter them so frequently in our cultural environments. Once lodged in our minds, hidden biases can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence.” (Banaji, M. & Greenwald, A., 2013, xii). The presence of and reasons for bias in the form of what the authors of *Blindspot* term “mindbugs” provides yet another layer to consider when contending with adult learning (or unlearning) on the topics of identity, bias, and critical self-reflection. The premise for Banaji and Greenwald is that in understanding how our minds work when it comes to bias, we can begin to work against it, or “outsmart the machine” (p. 146). They base their analysis and recommendations on results from Harvard’s Implicit Association Test or IAT. Similarly to Goff and Steele, this work contributes empirical data to present understandings of bias. One way this is helpful is that it alleviates the potential perception of accusation and blame that threatens to shut down productive conversations.

In still other studies, arguments have been made about the bidirectional nature of bias. For example, while blackness can trigger associations with crime, crime can also trigger associations with blackness (Eberhardt et al., 2004). The implications of multiple studies is “that black boys’ behavior in school becomes hyper-visible to teachers and educators” (Brown, 2017, p. 6). Furthermore, work has also been done on the internalizing of bias (and racism). In fact, Carter G. Woodson, often called the father of Black history, noted in his groundbreaking work *The Mis-Education of the Negro* first published in 1933: “The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples” (p. xiii). When bringing together the work on bias and stereotypes, one conclusion to be drawn is that such concepts and conditions exist as a net entangling interactions, not as unidirectional or even bidirectional exchanges or actions.

Bringing the topic of bias into the specific space of the school, a recent article by Olivia Marcucci looked at implicit bias in instances of school discipline. Analyzing “racial processing” and its impact on two types of disciplinary practices, punitive and rehabilitative, Marcucci (2019) acknowledges that implicit bias is often at odds with explicit attitudes. This observation has implications for professional development work because it suggests what educators say they believe and even think they believe can likely be at odds with their internalized value systems. Work needs to be done to unpack those beliefs in a safe way, so that they might be extricated from the structures of schools. This could be expanded to apply to student, family, and community beliefs as well. Specifically, Marcucci works with the “social desirability hypothesis” which maintains that teachers will attempt to work against “antiblackness” when

given the opportunity, but this can often lead to low expectations for Black students. The hopefulness is that this awareness signals a readiness to engage in anti-bias work coupled with a lack of understanding regarding the effective ways to do that work. Here is the space for professional development. Additionally, she concludes that punitive discipline is more likely to include bias than rehabilitative or restorative systems. Surprisingly, she found that white teachers were more likely to discipline white students harshly when they were motivated to work against antiblackness (p. 66). This overcompensation is not the goal of liberatory education or transformational work in general. Bringing awareness of this tendency is an important contribution of her study.

Those interested in taking steps to create professional development that explicitly takes on bias do not have to start from scratch. Analyses of work already being done in schools to address bias exist, including von Frank's reflection on the approach of the National Equity Project that trains and dispatches staff to partner with schools. "Coaches... lead participants through the emotional minefield of deep-rooted, sometimes unconscious biases." (2010, p. 21) This article describes the process that the National Equity Project uses to coach school staff as they work to address issues of inequity and bias. The core competencies for coaches, as presented in this article are: 1. Data-based inquiry, 2. Facilitative leadership, 3. Instructional leadership, 4. Equity-centered professional learning communities, 5. School design, 6. Cultural competence, and 7. Instructional coaching. The preparation coaches must go through and the ongoing support they receive to lead this work is worth noting. This process involves developing a theory of action, creating and maintaining trusting relationships, providing evidence of self-awareness, structuring conversations, and managing dynamics. The delineation of explicit steps has practical implications for this study. Navigating the dynamics of the staff and identifying those among the

staff that are ready for a leadership role themselves are components of an effective professional development plan.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Outside of the field of psychology, additional studies are also concerned with the ways in which racism is internalized for both students and teachers. “Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain power” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 57). This internalized bias is also taken up by Rita Kohli who deploys Critical Race Theory to investigate the ways in which teachers of color went about the work of unpacking their own internalized racism (2014). Before unpacking, it must be understood as:

(1) a phenomenon that, like racism, impacts all communities of color; (2) can be triggered by cumulative exposure to racism; and (3) results in the conscious or unconscious acceptance of racial hierarchy where the culture, values, and beliefs of the dominant culture are prioritized over the culture, values, and beliefs of racial minorities (p. 370).

To work against the reproduction of racism and/or internalized racism in classrooms, Kohli concludes it is essential to create safe spaces for ongoing dialog.

Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) are credited with creating a starting point for an oft cited as a turning point in the scholarly debate about educational inequities. They argue, “inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Their central theoretical contribution here is “Critical Race Theory in education, like its antecedent in legal scholarship, is a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms” (p. 62) They “underscore the difficulty (indeed, impossibility) of maintaining the spirit and intent of justice for the oppressed while simultaneously permitting the hegemonic rule of the oppressor. Thus, as critical race

theory scholars we unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail” (p. 62)

Boldly, critical race studies as legal scholarship as it is applied to educational practice rejects traditional civil rights approaches to remedying racism in our society. These scholars contend that these strategies do not challenge the structures of society and therefore benefit whites more than anyone else. More specifically, Critical Race Theory in education rejects multiculturalism as a viable approach to achieving equity. It is in unlinking democracy and capitalism and recognizing the role of property rights in the maintenance of oppression that the hope for change can be operationalized.

Many scholars studying education cite Ladson-Billings as originating the application of Critical Race Theory to education. Building upon her assertions, they are able to construct an understanding of the role of race in education that does not minimize racism as a wrong (located in individuals’ beliefs and actions) to be righted, but rather as an embedded element of the foundation upon which the system is built. This school of thought maintains that “the cause of [students’] poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism” (Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W., 1995, p. 55). Such a model then requires a very different approach to addressing racism in schools. For example, in his article, “From Subhuman to Human Kind” Brown (2017) argues that the root of racism in schools goes well beyond the beliefs of individual teachers. Rather, he states that racism is made real “by a durable historical discourse on black male deviance that can be traced to the beginnings of Western modernity” and that “the social realities black males currently face in schools are endemic to long-standing racial discourses” (p. 2). Brown relies on an analysis of scientific, religious, and social science work to trace the history of meaning creation regarding

black maleness, arriving at the conclusion that the various systems of knowledge have collectively rendered black males as nonhuman. Citing the work of famed post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, Brown argues the construction of the stereotype of the black male is co-created in tandem with the lived experiences of the black male, throughout history and today in schools. “It is a process of overdetermination that repeats itself through different historical and discursive junctures... The construction of the endangered and in-crisis black boy within the educational discourse uses discursive strategies that tell the truth about a social condition while also producing a new truth or stereotype about the black male” (p. 11).

Brown’s argument is significant in its implications for professional development because it redirects efforts away from isolating acts by individuals and zooms the lens out to take a long view of the “regimes of truth” that have anchored and maintained systems of oppression. In short, this study is positioned with a view of racism, and bias in general, as structural, implicating all in its web. It is not, so this argument goes, an issue of training individuals to think differently nor to celebrate difference. The task is to identify our place in the system and deconstruct the system. Effort must be made to problematize the practice of seeing black males as the “perpetual American problem.” Brown concludes, “Understanding the racial discourses that inform bias in schools is an important and vital step toward changing black males’s schooling experiences. To help teachers and school officials understand that the past is enveloped in our present ways of thinking about black males could help to disentangle some of the implicit associations made about black boys’ behavior in schools” (p. 12).

One productive additional direction is in following the line of thinking presented by Critical Race Theory towards a deconstruction of whiteness through professional development. With its origins in legal studies, Critical Race Theory problematizes whiteness as a matter of property

rights and argues that property rights, rather than human rights, are at the core of governmental priorities and actions. (Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W., 1995b). Taking up the call to render whiteness visible and to grapple with its embedded assumptions and attendant property rights, many scholars have engaged in Critical Whiteness Studies. Early important work includes David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* (1991), which tracks economic and psychological advantages ascribed to whiteness. Following Roediger, another example by a historian is Grace Hales's *Making Whiteness* (1998), which looks specifically at the American South from 1890-1940. More recently, the autobiographical *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving (2014) offers an example of coming to terms with being white, an identity that is often erased by its normalization. Surfacing it is part of the process of contending with privilege and the rights that come with association with whiteness. Finally, Robin Diangelo's *White Fragility* (2018) has received much attention recently. These and related books and articles are useful for this study because they lay bare the work done by whiteness in maintaining inequities, and they also provide models for contending with potential resistance encountered when engaging in transformative work.

Earlier works, such as "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism" (Tatum, 1992) give specific examples of the ways that explicit conversations about race can have transformative effects on the community in which those discussions happen. For Tatum, the environment was a college campus, but there are connections to be made between her classroom and the professional development space on a K-12 school site. Tatum examines the strong reactions some have in response to studying race related topics and suggests steps to take to foster productive engagement with the topic and materials. She describes racial identity formation theories as useful frameworks to facilitate sense making for participants as they grapple with the different reactions they may experience during this work. In addition to the importance of

developmental models, Tatum points to the need for establishing a safe space, creating opportunities for self-generated knowledge, and empowering participants to be agents of change. She relies on anecdotal evidence from participants in her Psychology of Racism classes, that, at the time of the article, she had taught 18 different times.

Scholars have deployed Critical Race Theory to evaluate professional development efforts in anti-bias and anti-racist trainings. Vaught and Castagno, for example, warn of the limitations of attempting to address structural inequalities through the individual transformation sought in a professional development setting (2008, p. 98). Their interviews with teacher participants demonstrate that many white teachers hold to the view that racism is an individual behavior or belief and not a structural issue; they offer the conceptualization of whiteness as property as a remedy for this (mis)understanding. They point out, “in the absences of an explicitly structural understanding of racism, many white teachers drew on the propertied right to determine meaning to construct a definition of White privilege devoid of attention to structural power” (p. 103). Additionally, their research shows the risks of substituting culture for race in that it erases the structural nature of inequities. They found schools that engaged in anti-bias training which focused on culture inevitably framed their efforts as an opportunity for teachers (assumed to be white) to learn about students who were culturally different from them and thereby be more effective teachers. This premise denies the role of power and structure in the dynamic, rendering it one of individuals interacting across differences. They repeatedly assert the importance of acknowledging the structural and collective nature of racism and privilege to avoid “a discursively moral critique of racism, [while] maintaining the larger structures that fail to promote true equity for children of color” (p. 107). Common among training efforts was to collapse awareness and transformation. Critics rightly pointed out that awareness is not the same

as change, and that awareness in itself sometimes bred additional hostilities when it was interpreted and individualized and perceived to be containing blame. Their suggestion, relevant to this study is that “professional development is a healthy and essential part of change, if in fact the training focuses on the structural elements of racialized achievement inequities and gives all teachers tools to understand their position in structural systems and systemic change” (p. 111).

The article described above is an example of the application of Critical Race Theory which calls for a recognition of whiteness as property and the rights that confer on its in-group members. Among these rights are access to an individual identity and the right to make meaning. Critical Race Theory suggests that one way to change the ways in which meanings are made is through the act of storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 57). Richard Delgado, a groundbreaking legal scholar, has made the case for the importance of storytelling in the court setting. He asserts that stories are interpretive structures and therefore can be an important tool for racial reform as “stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo” (1987, p. 2414). There is potential to delve deeper into the power of storytelling to promote transformative change within the school setting.

Another helpful contextualizing idea is the concept of “dysconscious racism,” a term I came across in an article by Joyce King. It details a study she engaged in as a professor in a teacher education program. First published in 1991 in the *Journal of Negro Education*, her work was later republished in the book *Critical White Studies*. She begins with a premise useful for formulating a starting point for the creation of professional development for educators. “Most of the students begin my teacher education courses with limited knowledge and distorted understanding of societal inequity” (1997, p. 128). It may be helpful to conceptualize staff attending professional development in the same way, with limited knowledge and distorted

understandings of the subject matter at hand. For situating my research question in the larger conversation, this work by King is also part of a conversational trail coalescing around work done to render whiteness visible and problematize it. The *Critical White Studies* volume, containing much of this work, was edited by Richard Delgado, mentioned above, who is a prominent scholar in the Critical Race Theory movement in legal studies. The intersection of legal studies and work in education around race is a conversation this study hopes to contribute to.

Following Joyce's formulation, dysconscious racism is the context for many educators today. They are not explicitly or intentionally racist, yet they do not possess a critical consciousness. Dysconscious racism is "an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race... Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity accepted certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages white people have as a result of subordinating others" (p. 128). King argues that this type of awareness must be brought to the surface to enable transformative change.

Storytelling has already been mentioned as a desirable and valuable way to construct new knowledge. It is also a vehicle for surfacing awareness. On the other side of the telling is the act of listening. Julian Weissglass (1990) approaches meaning making through constructivist listening protocols. In "Constructivist Listening for Empowerment and Change," he notes that "the depth of the relationship between feelings and educational change is rarely acknowledged" (p. 1). Work that highlights the need for critical consciousness does recognize that in-depth reflection on individual beliefs, values, feelings, and practices is essential for educators engaged in transformational work. Additionally, many scholars acknowledge the challenge and even pain of such critical reflection. Weissglass worries that there is a lack of concrete supports to help folks

engage in what indeed is challenging and potentially painful work. He offers constructivist listening as one approach. While explaining how to engage in this practice, Weisglass notes the intention is to “encourage the talker to reflect on the meaning of events and ideas; express and work through feelings that are interfering with clearer thinking; construct new meanings; and make decisions” (p. 4). This activity also has the potential to introduce important subjectivities into the space to further the collective, co-creation of meaning and to move towards action.

### **Critically Relevant Pedagogy**

Gloria Ladson-Billings has written many pieces on the impact of race and racism on educational outcomes for students, and her work is central to any study that attempts to contribute to conversations about bias and professional development. One of her primary contributions to the scholarship relevant to this study is her conceptualizing of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a reaction to a line of other pedagogies referencing culture that were rooted in a concern with sociolinguistic interactions. For Ladson-Billings (1995a), these models missed the big picture of school as a potentially hostile space for students and part of the larger story of institutional racism. Therefore, she presented culturally relevant pedagogy as having three key elements: an insistence on academic success, respect for students’ cultural integrity, and a focus on critical consciousness. (p. 160). Ladson-Billings’ description of the specifics of effective teacher practice within this framework holds promising threads to focus on in professional development aimed at addressing identity, bias, and critical self-reflection. For example, one suggestion she makes is recognizing parents and other community members as experts rather than the more common move on the part of teachers and schools which is to import experts from outside the community for classroom visits. Contending

with the bias that may prevent educators from such moves is part of the goal of professional development.

Specifically concerned with pedagogical practice and the development of a critical consciousness, Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade (2007) conducted a study over three years in Los Angeles. His work offers a significant contribution to the conversation begun by Ladson-Billings and several others. He posits a two part framework for understanding what it means to be an effective urban educator. The first part of his model is the “gangsta, wanksta, rida” paradigm. Embedding his theoretical work within hip hop culture, Duncan-Andrade explicates these terms for us. “Gangstas” are teachers who actively dislike the students and their community and are the staff who advocate for the maintenance of oppressive systems including zero-tolerance discipline policies. “Wankstas” are the teachers who sit on the fence. Duncan-Andrade uses the image of a balance scale and positions these teachers in the center, tipping the school in neither direction. He suggests they hold potential because they can be brought around to do transformative work. Lastly, there are the “Ridas,” from the term “ride or die,” who are fiercely committed to their students and the community, willing to do the difficult and sometimes painful work of deep emotional investment in students and critical reflection on their own practice. After sorting urban teachers into these three categories, from a study of ridas’ classroom practices, Duncan-Andrade determined 5 pillars of effective teacher practice: critically conscious purpose, duty, preparation, socratic sensibility, and trust (p. 624).

Duncan-Andrade’s is significant because of his emphasis on critical consciousness which is in direct conversation with Ladson-Billings’ assertion that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy must include this element for both teachers and students. Additionally, critical consciousness has been the piece of the pedagogical practice that has been most absent from implementations of

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, as Ladson-Billings (2014) has observed them, causing her to lament the use that her theory has been put to in many instances. For Duncan-Andrade, this consciousness includes a recognition of structural inequities. Teachers understand oppression in various forms, and worked specifically to understand the communities in which they did their work (p. 625). One of the powerful expressions of this stance as described in the article is the idea of return. Traditional notions of education frame it as a means by which poor students and students of color can escape where they come from, a narrative that devalues students' identities and their communities. Educators with critical consciousness value students' identities and home communities, offering education as a possibility for the student to be a resource for their families and communities. Success in school then does not mean a denial of where a student comes from or who they are individually. Rather, it becomes empowering and positions them as agents of change for themselves and those they care about. Additionally, educators with this consciousness build analyses of injustice explicitly into their curriculum. For the purposes of creating meaningful professional development, it is important to note that teachers must understand oppression to begin to build this consciousness. Then, they may likely need support with translating awareness into action.

From its original formulation, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy has inspired many educators to adopt these practices and push further the notion of being "culturally relevant." In 2014, Ladson-Billings' herself offered a "remix" of her original theory (p. 75). Noting the work of others to bring a feminist perspective as well as to acknowledge the ever changing nature of culture, "culturally sustaining pedagogy" emerged as the next iteration of these ideas. At the heart of this line of inquiry in the field of education is the conceptualization of the most underserved students as *subjects not objects*, and as students in possession of multiple assets. Prior to this work, most

writing on African American students specifically insisted on a deficits lens (p. 76). Once Culturally Relevant Pedagogy had taken hold as an approach to teaching, Ladson-Billings laments that it was reduced to something she could no longer recognize. “The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting ‘diverse’ images makes one ‘culturally relevant’ seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to” (p. 82). She warns that the critical consciousness piece of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy has been especially lost in the shuffle, yet it is the key to seeing and undoing the system which makes Duncan-Andrade’s contribution that much more central for creating professional development that avoids reproducing what Ladson-Billings witnessed. Maintaining an awareness of the ways schools can dilute radical approaches by way of implementation, professional development offerings must contain safeguards against that possibility. This scholarship navigates a space in the conversation that acknowledges the interplay between Culturally Relevant, Culturally Sustaining, and Culturally Revitalizing Pedagogies, while never sitting still because culture is always shifting, therefore educators we must always be adjusting forward.

Ladson-Billings closes her “remix” with an important reminder that transformational education does not only support underserved students from historically oppressed groups while leaving those with inherited privilege to carry on as usual. “In our attempt to ensure that those who have been previously disadvantaged by schooling receive quality education, we also want those in the mainstream to develop the kinds of skills that will allow them to critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage” (p. 83). Professional development spaces must not allow the attitude to emerge that educators seek to change things “for *those* kids” but that rather we are seeking a change for us all.

“Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a the Remix,” from which the above observations are drawn, was published as an introduction to a symposium in the 2014 Spring edition of the Harvard Educational Review. Articles that accompanied Ladson-Billings’ included ones that elaborated on Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogy, acknowledging Django Paris (2012) being one of the scholars contributing to the evolution of Ladson-Billings’ theories. Building on that work, a subsequent article appeared also in the Harvard Educational Review, advocating for cross-talk between Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning. This article offers an analysis of the intersections between race and dis/ability (touched upon in this study in the brief overview of disproportionality in education which includes racial identity overdetermining the likelihood of students being perceived as “disabled”). “Students with dis/abilities have experienced oppression with great consequence for who accesses learning, whose abilities are recognized and valued, and who participates in decision making in schools. Thus, pedagogies that value ethnic, racial, and language differences simultaneously and intentionally must be committed to disrupting those that have historically pathologized students’ abilities” (Waitoller, F. & Thorius, K., 2016, p. 367). It is worth noting that crosstalk, or embedding anti-bias work in other priorities for professional development increases the likelihood that it will become a core practice.

### **Conclusion**

Upon following the scholarship in a variety of directions, Gloria Ladsen-Billings emerged as a scholar working at the intersection of several conversations to which this study aims to contribute. She states, “...those who do this work understand that not knowing is one of the most powerful tools and motivators for doing more and doing it better” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). If educators accept that they know little about the subtle yet powerful influence of identity and

bias on education, from the ways curriculum is selected and planned, to shaping interactions between those within the school setting, perhaps they might open themselves up to new ways of thinking and acting with the end goal of creating more equitable opportunities and outcomes for students. The central question of this study aims to determine what might happen in such a moment. Specifically, the research questions being posed is: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators?

In addition to the scholars mentioned in the preceding review of literature, there are several organizations engaged in similar work from which examples can be taken. They include People's Institute for Survival and Beyond which offers a training called Undoing Racism, Education for Liberation Network which presents the Free Minds, Free People conference, National Writing Project, Algebra Project, Transformative Pedagogy Project out of UCSB, and the School Reform Initiative. Influential in the shaping of the lens for this study are San Francisco Coalition for Essential Small Schools (SF-CESS) and the National Equity Project. Both of these organizations are headquartered in the Bay Area, engaged in work with educators to confront bias and promote critical consciousness. This study is situated in the conversations and literature concerned with dismantling the systems of oppression that continue to plague our schools and the students attempting to learn within them. One contribution it makes to the existing work is specifically examining the experiences of teachers as they learn about the topics of identity and bias on their journey to developing a critical consciousness.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Eliminating the negative consequences of biases playing out in classrooms and across school settings is imperative if more equitable opportunities and outcomes are to be achieved for students. One approach to bringing these issues to the surface is through targeted professional development for school staff. The research question posed in this study was: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators?

The researcher engaged in a qualitative study, specifically utilizing the methodology of phenomenology to understand the various lived experiences of a group of educators who attended a professional development series aimed at surfacing identity and bias and promoting critical self-reflection. This chapter describes the design of the study, the participants involved in the study, the setting in which the study took place, instruments used to analyze participant experiences, the procedures followed, the process of analysis, and the resulting conclusions reached as a result.

#### **Design**

In order to understand the experiences of educators engaging in targeted professional development addressing the topics of identity, bias, and critical self-reflection, a qualitative approach was most appropriate. Specifically, this study was a hermeneutical phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of a range of educators attending the same professional development sessions in which the intersectionality of individual identities and the bias connected to those identities is analyzed and reflected upon. The approach is exemplified by two researchers who sought to understand the experience of healthcare workers during ethically difficult situations (Lindseth, A., & Norberg, A., 2004). This methodology also was the best fit

for this study because it included the recounting of participants' experiences and the interpretation of the texts generated through the recounting. Phenomenology suggests there are meanings to be derived from the study of the lived experience as it is recorded and shared through text. Hermeneutics reveals the role of interpretation in making sense of those texts. The differences between phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology are important for the approach of this study. Lavery (2003) explores the difference between the two methodologies, and one key difference for this study is that a phenomenological approach would focus on the participants as "knowers," whereas hermeneutic phenomenology is more concerned with interpretation and the historically situated position of the one doing the interpreting: "Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing the world from our own background and experiences" (p. 24).

Because the focus of this study was the lived experience of educators throughout a professional development series, as reflected in the work they produced during the series, which they then recounted and attributed meaning to in surveys and interviews, this approach was most appropriate. More specifically, the participants engaged with questions about who they are in the world and what their actions say about their values, privilege or lack thereof, and how they are positioned within systems of oppression. Each participant was at a different place in their own personal and professional development in relationship to these topics (their ZPDs were very different), which resulted in intensely individualized experiences and meaning making processes. Phenomenological studies centralize the experience of the individual not to generalize it to others but to learn from it. According to Mertler (2019), "the underlying assumption in this approach is there are multiple ways of interpreting the same experience, as well as multiple meanings to be derived from it" (p. 82).

## **Participants**

The participants in the study were educators, both certificated and classified staff, who all work in the same charter school organization and attended the same professional development sessions. The organization has 52 total employees, 2 of whom designed and implemented the training and 5 of whom were hired at some point during or after the professional development series. This left a total of 45 potential participants in the survey, activities and interviews. They ranged in age from mid-twenties, some of whom were first year teachers or support staff to mid-sixties, some of whom are engaged in education as a second career. While all staff involved in the training were given the option to complete a pre and post survey, responses were received from 44 total staff for the pre survey. From that group, 6 individuals participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The participants will be referred to with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the study.

## **Setting**

The educators in the study are employees of the same charter school organization which serves students from transitional kindergarten through 12th grade. There are two physical sites that make up the school system, located in San Diego County. However, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, while schools were closed, requiring these training sessions and interviews take place online. The format of online professional development is different from in-person trainings and this likely impacted the experience of the educators involved. Additionally, it is worth considering the context of the pandemic and the stress of teaching online that may have impacted some of the participants' overall state of mind and experience of the professional development series. After all, they were making meaning of their specific experiences in the context of a larger, unprecedented one.

In addition to the pandemic, other significant contextual factors include the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests across the country. Because the content of the professional development series was identity, bias, and critical self-reflection, topics of race, racism, systems of oppression were directly related. While anti-bias work is ongoing, the current events brought a relevance and urgency that may not have been felt as widely at other moments, and were explicitly addressed in the professional development series. It is possible that current events may have contributed to the rationale for the learning and given staff more of a reason to be engaged.

### **Instruments**

Both the pre and post experience surveys were original and created by the researcher. All staff were asked to fill out the pre survey on a voluntary basis. This was followed with the actual professional development series. Some of the artifacts created in those sessions were used for this study with participant consent. A post survey was issued to staff at the conclusion of the training. Again, the responses were voluntary. Finally, a sample of participants were invited to engage in semistructured interviews with the researcher. These interviews took place on Zoom and were transcribed for further analysis.

### **Procedures**

To begin the study, the Chief Executive Officer of the organization was contacted and permission to conduct the study was granted. The study took place in the context of an annual professional development series which spans the ten days before the first day of instruction for the school year. Prior to the beginning of the training, all staff received an email with an information sheet. Because the professional development had to take place online, Google Classroom was used as the platform for all activities. The surveys contained an opt-in electronic consent at the beginning of the survey and participants were notified that they could choose to

skip questions contained within the survey, none of the questions required responses and some were left blank by various participants. Participants were able to discontinue the survey and interview at any time without penalty.

Next, the participants engaged in a series of activities and learning opportunities that constituted a professional development experience centered around identity, bias, and critical self-reflection. The specifics of the activities are described in more detail in Chapter 4. With permission from the participants, certain artifacts were analyzed and included in the study. Upon completion of the training, staff were asked to complete a post survey. This survey was voluntary with an opt-in consent and opportunities to skip questions throughout, in the same format as the pre survey.

Several staff were invited to participate in a follow up semi-structured interview. Consent was obtained to conduct the interviews via Zoom. No face-to-face interviews were possible due to health guidelines in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which caused the schools operated by this organization to close on March 13, 2020 at which time they transitioned to distance learning, and were continuing in that format at the time of this study. Those who consented to participate in the interviews scheduled 60 minute blocks with the researcher and engaged in a conversation regarding their experience with and takeaways from the professional development series.

### **Analysis**

The theoretical lens applied in this study was Cultural Proficiency. “The key to understanding Cultural Proficiency begins with recognizing the existence of different worldviews” (Lindsey, R. et al, 2019, p. 75). Understanding the participants in this study would bring their varied worldviews to bear when making meaning of their experiences in the professional development

series was taken into consideration as a fundamental element of the study. Furthermore, Cultural Proficiency calls for “inside-out” change, which was an appropriate framework to apply to an analysis of a training that asked for critical self-reflection on the part of the participants. This framework contains five essential elements: assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge (p. 78). The researcher applied this lens in assessing participants' work and feedback, recognizing both the healthy and unhealthy practices that may have been potentially present within the responses to the professional development.

Once the surveys were collected, artifacts gathered, and interviews conducted, the researcher began to analyze the various experiences of participants using coding as a technique and intercoder reliability to validate the results. An inductive analysis of the data was performed, taking into consideration the three steps of organization, description, and analysis (Mertler, C.. 2019). Once the data was coded and analyzed, the researcher organized it into several themes for presenting the findings and suggested areas for further analysis.

### **Conclusion**

This study was a qualitative investigation into answering the research question: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? The researcher applied the methodology of hermeneutical phenomenological analysis to the lived experiences of a range of educators attending the same professional development series to surface the variety of meanings made by the participants during their experience. Acknowledging that there may be some impact as a result of the training and the interviews taking place online due to COVID-19 pandemic,

surveys, interviews, and other artifacts were collected, coded and validated through intercoder reliability.

The hermeneutical phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study because it accounts for the varied experiences and interpretations participants would report, seeing the value in the layers of experience, not in a generalizable fact or finding. Also, taking into consideration the theories about adult learning, one could argue that this approach validates the idea of the adult learner as an agent in their learning, determining what is relevant to them, connecting it to prior experiences, and making meaning by applying the learning to real life situations. Central to the study was the notion of participant (adult learner) perspective (Mertler, C., 2019). In Chapter Four, the specifics of each participant's experience as told by them will be described and analyzed. An interpretation of the data will then be offered by the researcher.

## Chapter 4: Results

Based upon progress made within the field of education itself, as well as the external pressures of outside forces in our current world, bias in teacher practice is being highlighted and addressed in various educational spaces. Opportunity and achievement gaps have been thoroughly documented and analyzed yet still little progress has been made with the exception of a few pockets where success stories exist. This study posed the question: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? The driving motivation behind asking the question was the hypothesis that for educators to be truly effective in teaching all students, they must first contend with the ways their own personal experiences and identities show up in their work. While this study did not look at the student outcomes that may or may not reflect a change in teacher belief and action, the study focused on the experiences of the educators and what they took away from a series of professional development offerings. How did they experience the professional development offerings? How did they make sense of what they learned? How did they hope to apply it to their work moving forward?

With this context in mind, the results of the study will be presented and analyzed. This chapter is organized around themes that emerged from the research question itself. First, results are presented regarding the identities of the participants. Next, their reflections and takeaways on biases are considered. Lastly, there is information presented related to the ongoing work of critical self-reflection. To explore each of these themes, information obtained from the surveys, the work during the PD, and the interviews after will all be reviewed. This chapter includes a presentation of the data, an analysis of the data, an interpretation of the data, and a conclusion. In

the subsequent chapter, the researcher will reflect on the learnings gleaned from the data and suggestions for moving forward with action and with further investigation.

### **Data Presentation**

The school within which the study took place has explicitly stated that it is philosophically social reconstructivist, meaning there is a foundational belief that the goal and purpose of education is to create a better and more just world. This is a very different context than a school system that engages in a process of education that serves to maintain status quo hierarchies. Additionally, the organization cites Design Thinking as its grounding methodological practice, which also posits as the potential of the future as-yet unrealized solutions to current problems. This is not a school system that ever looks to tradition or “the way things have always been done” nor does it support the maintenance of the status quo. In fact, employees are asked to be risk takers and to fail publicly. As a result, the willingness to engage in professional development that feels risky or that calls into question our current society and its systems, may be more warmly received by this particular staff than others.

During a typical year, this group of educators would gather in person for professional development. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, professional development took place completely online. In an attempt to reduce screen time, or “Zoom fatigue,” a decision was made to conduct much of the work asynchronously. The conversations and connections that would likely have pushed the learning forward for many were largely absent. An attempt to compensate for that was made by using discussion board activities, but that cannot replicate interaction and lively discussions. Several reflections mentioned that as being a significant factor in the perceived usefulness of the professional development offerings.

The data gathered is presented here organized around the themes articulated in the research question: identity, bias, and self reflection. Identity activities asked participants to unpack their own identity as a means of analyzing how they show up in their work and what impact that might have both on their own beliefs and actions as well as the way others perceive and respond to them. Activities around bias included work in the field of psychology, including work previewed in the literature review of this project, as well as activities regarding microaggressions and types of discourse. Finally, self reflection involved a combination of sharing experience, journaling, and voluntary participation in reflective interviews.

*Identity:* The first collection of data is organized around the theme of identity. For the purposes of this study identity will be considered from the lens of intersectionality. Participants were presented with an article by Jane Coatson (2019) to introduce intersectionality as it was theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, though many reported they were already familiar with the concept. In fact, of the 44 participants who completed the pre survey, only six said they did not know what intersectionality was at the beginning of the PD, compared to seventeen who said they understood it and could explain it to others, and six who chose the response “it’s something I think about often; it’s my jam.” Participants were then asked to engage in several activities designed to support their examination and reflection on their own intersectional identities and how that might impact the ways they show up in their work, how they respond to others, and how others see and interact with them. As the series began, respondents reported on how comfortable they felt reflecting on their own identities:

The process of reflecting on who I am (my own identity, beliefs, and values) is an activity that makes me feel:	Uncomfortable, it is difficult to turn the spotlight on myself	Neutral, it neither troubles me nor seems helpful or rewarding	Good, it is productive/helpful to think about who I am
	6.81%	6.81%	86.36%

All of the respondents that reported being uncomfortable also identified as white. All of the respondents that reported finding it neither helpful or troubling were white with the exception of one, who identified as Hispanic. Hispanic was the word they chose, there were no predetermined racial categories; that question appeared as a fill in the blank. Other participants from a similar demographic group opted for the terms Latnix, Chicano, and Mexican.

Once they had time to work through the material around identity, participants were asked to reflect on their own in video posts their colleagues could watch and respond to. One participant shared in an interview after the activity, she felt most of the educators who made the posts stayed at a very superficial level, suggesting continued discomfort with either unpacking individual identities, sharing personal identities, or both.

Another question was posed to determine if educators believed that students and families interact with them differently based upon who they are.

Who I am impacts the ways students and families interact with me.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	29.55%	56.82%	11.36%	0%	2.27%

In one of the subsequent reflective interviews, a male participant commented on a pattern they recently become aware of, at the high school level. He noted that male students tended to see male staff as potential challenges or even as threats, and he had witnessed female staff intervene successfully when male staff seemed only to escalate certain situations. This reflection alluded to a need to do work around power and gender for staff to consider how students perceive and respond to staff. Educators cannot not be who they are, but they can assess the ways in which their identity influences situations. The same participant noted that size, body language, and voice tone and volume also contributed to these same situations.

Another aspect of identity educators engaged with was in what ways social identities impact how emotions are shown. For example, educators worked through questions about where it was safe to show glad, mad, sad, or scared. Connections were made to both gender and racial identities and whether individuals feel they can show or must hide certain emotions. In a subsequent interview, one participant mentioned making a connection between this activity and their own response to student behaviors, realizing that perhaps she responded differently to anger or frustration when a male student was demonstrating it versus when a female student was demonstrating those feelings.

*Bias:* To introduce the concept of bias, participants in this session were given selections from the book *Blindspot* (which is described in the literature review section of this thesis) to read. They were also directed to Harvard's Implicit Association Test (IAT) website to take one of the bias tests. Participants self-reported which test they took, what their results were, and what their reactions to the results were. Prior to the PD activities, there were two questions on the pre survey directly connected to bias:

The way someone looks influences the way I interact with them.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	0%	25%	20.46%	27.27%	27.27%

The results to this question may be largely aspirational. Many might not want to believe, and might not notice, if they act differently depending on how people look, whether they actually do or do not. However, it is difficult to imagine that many people are exactly the same around anyone, no matter who it is. Code switching is a perfectly acceptable social tool, and people should use it, but people do not want to be perceived as treating people differently, so they state they do not because they equate treating people differently as being biased.

The second question was an open response to the following prompt: In your opinion, or based on your experience, what role does bias play in educational opportunities and outcomes for students? Answers mostly acknowledged educators' awareness of bias in education. Some examples are:

“A huge role and it is sad how noticeable it is.”

“It plays the biggest role. I've seen it be, both, beneficial and I've seen it crush others. We all have biases, understanding our own is the only way we can move forward together and with the good of those around us in mind.”

“In my experience, bias mostly plays a negative part in schools. I've seen students treated unfairly just because of their outward appearances, disabilities, etc. Not being called on, spoken to more harshly than others. The outcomes are a negative impact on the students behavior, discouragement and lower self-confidence.”

“Bias plays a large role in opportunities and outcomes for students. The media often portrays people of color in a negative light. This portrait of a particular community can have a negative impact on how they are viewed therefore limiting opportunities. At times, these groups are subject to discrimination at great lengths. Stereotypes form and bias occurs.”

“A huge role. We need to constantly question if our bias, beliefs, and background experience are impacting each student in a positive manner and creating better outcomes.”

Not a single survey respondent suggested that bias does not impact students' experiences and outcomes. It is worth noting the question implied that it does play a role based on the way it was worded, and therefore respondents started from that point and explained the role it does play.

The professional development series continued with bias in language. As a way to unpack this, educators engaged with the paradigm of Discourse I and Discourse II. One staff member completed this activity with the following observations:

Prompt: Choose a student that has presented you with a challenge to your practice (you're not sure how to engage them, your usual strategies aren't working, you find yourself reacting in a way that surprises you, etc.)

Try to describe what is happening objectively. Just the facts! No judgement, interpretation, etc.
This student is very smart and capable. However, he tends to do the bare minimum of quality work and/or the quantity of work to get by. He is very distracted by his interest (mainly gaming), and doesn't devote much time or effort to his school work. As a result, he was on the verge of failing a class he could easily pass.
How might you explain the above facts using a <b>Discourse I</b> frame?
Dropouts/Check-outs: <i>I'm not so sure that school is the priority for these students.</i> Given my experience with this student, and the "tough love" approach I used with him early on, I may have done more to perpetuate this frame. By the end of the year, especially with COVID-19 and distance learning, he had completely checked out.
Now, reframe the explanation using a <b>Discourse II</b> frame.
Push-outs: <i>How are we engaging students to ensure their interest and not their apathy?</i>  I know that I did not do enough to reach this student, or do it the best way. My approach should've been more empathetic to "where he was" at the time, and not how I perceived things.
With your team, brainstorm some strategies you might try with this student over the next week. Keep in mind a Discourse II frame as well as our focus on Restorative Practices.
Strategies pending...

The intention of engaging in Discourse I and II comparisons is to bring awareness and an opportunity for self reflection to educators who may unwittingly reproduce hierarchies through word choice that they wrongly perceive to be neutral.

Educators also grappled with the 4 I's of Oppression and engaged in a discussion board forum. Several participants recommended books to each other and despite the notes lack of connections based on the absence of live discussion, there was an evident back and forth

regarding this topic. Significantly, however, almost half the participants in professional development did not participate in the discussion. The silence might be the most significant data point when considering the effectiveness of the series. What obstacles to participation were in their way? This is considered more in chapter five.

*Self Reflection:* At the closing of the PD series, there were several activities prompting self-reflection. One of these activities asked about purpose. Why do you do the work you do? One teacher spoke to the relevance of thinking about identity and bias in the context of current events:

Now after all of the talk around systematic racism and the civil rights/social justice movement currently happening, I have adopted a more meaningful why. Students are suffering from the inequitable way education runs in our state and country. Teachers are suffering because they don't have the proper training or resources to support those students who are suffering. So here I am, now trying to change how the educational system is funded and how resources are equitably distributed among schools.

This teacher expanded upon this comment in an interview, where she shared that specific steps she was taking to change her practice included acquiring a library of books that were more representational. She also noted that she recognized she herself had been a trigger for some of her students based upon her tone and body language. She also reported that she has taken steps to further her learning on these topics beyond the required professional development, doing readings and listening to podcasts that dig into these topics.

A teacher of a similar grade level shared quite an opposite takeaway. She stated that she had been very uncomfortable completing much of the activities that were included in the PD sessions. She explained that she avoids talking about values and beliefs at work. She maintained that she does not judge people for theirs and does not want to be judged by others for hers. She also expressed a fear of doing or saying the wrong thing and of subsequently getting in trouble. Relatedly, rather than celebrating the “fail publicly” value of the school, she reported wishing there was more structure and direction for her work in general. She finds the idea of tradition and

status quo comforting, and is not invested in disrupting it. Another participant completed a self-reflection that did not touch on any of the topics from the training, instead sharing “takeaways” about how to assign work and communicate with families about due dates, which was not covered in the series. Perhaps such a closing reflection reveals lingering discomfort with the topics addressed. One might hypothesize that these reactions may be more in line with the feelings held by many staff at more traditional schools.

### **Data Analysis**

A plethora of data was collected and reviewed during the duration of this project. As a result of the methodological approach and the application of the lens of Cultural Proficiency by the researcher, there is an acknowledgement that the conclusions drawn from the data are specific to the researcher’s interpretation, as determined through the use of a coding systems to identify emerging themes to be applied to the future creation of professional development that aims at creating equitable opportunities and outcomes for students with the assumption that educators must begin by contending with how they show up in their own work as a result of the unique constellation of their own identities and experiences.

As a result of the data, the researcher arrived at five recommendations or considerations for moving forward. These are detailed in chapter five and include differentiated curation, facilitated connection, ongoing application, reciprocal accountability, and expanding self-awareness. While the specific answers provided by participants were instructive for the researcher, equally as meaningful were the silences. These served as data points revealing discomfort or disengagement, which must be addressed should the work be fully embraced by a community of educators. In fact, several participants noted frustration with their colleagues’ lack of engagement. Yet, most were not comfortable bringing that directly to the attention of the

offending member of the community. Through these conversations the theme of reciprocal accountability emerged. Facilitators of professional development should strive to create safe spaces where participants can “go to the source” when something is not sitting right with them.

The data showed that participants who were already thinking about the topics of identity and bias were far more receptive and enthusiastic about the material in the professional development, revealing the necessity to engage in frontloading or individual conversations with participants who might be more reluctant or uncomfortable. The data also showed that the participants least comfortable with the topics also identified as white, which suggests the need for work to be done in the area of deconstructing whiteness or on confronting white privilege. These were not explicit topics within the series, yet there is abundant recent scholarship available to be incorporated into future professional development.

### **Interpretation**

Individual educators arrive in professional development spaces in very different places on their own unique journeys. Trusting others and being vulnerable are actions not all participants were willing to engage in for a variety of reasons. This limited how some participants could engage with the material or share with the group. There were many opportunities for self-reflection that were intended to be kept private, so comfort with the community members was not a prerequisite for engaging. For the specific topics being covered in this series, some were incredibly comfortable and eager to engage, some were reluctant and guarded. The initial disposition of the participant impacted the experience they had with the material.

Data collected was interpreted using a coding system to look for emerging themes related to the research question. The researcher, being a site leader and directly responsible for the creation and implementation of the professional development acted as a participant researcher,

acknowledging the impact of positional power on the self reporting of colleagues. Because the researcher was an insider to the organization and the activities through which data was collected, there was some inevitable impact to the study. For example, the researcher knows the respondents beyond the scope of the study, so during interviews would have additional knowledge of the interviewee that may impact the direction of follow up questions or the lens through which the researcher interprets the participants' answers. The fact that the research was done completely online also created a potential limitation or impact to the study. Participants mentioned that as a factor for how they experienced and reflected on the series.

### **Conclusion**

Educators engaged with topics of identity, bias and critical self reflection through multiple modalities. Bringing their unique backgrounds to the space, some were able to engage comfortably and enthusiastically, while others expressed reluctance. Their participation and self-reporting created qualitative data points to analyze the efficacy of PD that requires educators to look at themselves first, which is not often the perspective taken in such sessions. Data was collected to answer the question: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? What emerged, as expected, was evidence of quite varied lived experiences reported by educators even while engaging with identical material, on the same platform, in the same timeframe. Based upon the specifics of those reports, conclusions can be made regarding key steps to ensure meaningful professional development become operationalized in educator practice. If the goal of PD is to create equitable opportunities and outcomes for students, to support student achievement, and to create healthy educational spaces for learning, the content of PD must make the jump from material learned by educators to actions taken in our schools.

Creating that bridge from theory to action is what the key findings attempt to support. Those findings will be reviewed in chapter five.

## Chapter Five: Lessons Learned

What can be learned from the experiences of a handful of staff in a series of professional development opportunities? How can those learnings be applied to professional development in general, to create a coherent plan for moving forward with meaningful and relevant opportunities for staff to support them as they confront the inequitable outcomes for students that have been a hallmark of our education system for so long? Every individual is just that, an individual who arrives in a PD space with a unique configuration of experiences, beliefs, intersectional identity categories, and personality traits. It is the premise of this study that engaging with the individuality of each educator is the prerequisite for putting beliefs and values into action. Learning from the specific experiences of a set of educators may shed light on productive ways to move professional development forward. With that in mind, this study sought to answer the questions: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators?

In this chapter, the findings from the previous chapter are organized and interpreted for takeaways. First, in the finding summary, findings are organized into five themes that emerged from the research. In the next section, findings are interpreted with consideration for variables and discrepancies that emerged. Most significantly, this was a study of individual experiences, therefore the discrepancies might be attributed to the personal lens that each participant brings to the experience. That, in itself, remains a key consideration for the creation and implementation of professional development. Next, the findings will be compared to the positions taken by scholars who were highlighted in the literature review. This project is part of a larger conversation about equity, student outcomes, and the role of the educator. The potential contribution of this study to that larger conversation is explored in the section addressing

implications, recommendations, and lessons learned. Finally, this chapter contains a discussion of the limitations of the findings and the possible future directions that studies might take to move this conversation forward.

### **Finding Summary**

The premise of this research project was the importance of the identity and self-awareness of the teacher as a key ingredient for addressing inequitable opportunities and outcomes for students. The researcher determined that professional development might be a space in which educators build awareness about how their individual identity impacts how they show up in their work. As a result of these foundational assumptions, the question was posed: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? The purpose of the study was not to determine a link between teacher beliefs and behaviors and student outcomes. Rather, the study sought to understand the experiences of teachers in these professional development spaces as means to gauge the effectiveness of PD and the potential for change to be enacted as a result.

After reviewing the qualitative data, which took the form of surveys, interviews, and artifacts from the professional development, the key findings have been arranged into five themes or buckets of takeaways. The first is the need for *differentiated curation* of professional development. The second is the need for *facilitated connections* between participants. A third theme that emerged was the need for *ongoing application*. Another takeaway is the challenge and necessity of *reciprocal accountability*. The final theme was the need for *expanding self-awareness*. The researcher analyzed and interpreted the data in order to glean learnings that would contribute to the implementation of future professional development that addresses inequitable opportunities and outcomes for students. These findings acknowledge that this

approach to professional development, one in which the teacher is centered and is asked to look inward, cannot be done without corresponding, student-centered professional development that addresses teaching and learning. Culturally Responsive (Sustaining) Pedagogy is pointed to by this study as a promising line of development for educators to meet the requirement of being student-centered.

*Differentiated Curation:* As expected, each participant had a different specific lived experience of the professional development offerings. These experiences ran that gamut. Some found it to be not enough and expressed disappointment, while some found it to be too much and expressed being overwhelmed. Some were uncomfortable and reluctant. Some were excited to keep pushing. Some were inspired to try new things as a result. The sample of educators who were inspired to try new things offers the next step in the research. What do they have in common? How can the conditions that created this experience for them be understood in a way that enables facilitating that experience for others. After all, the goal of professional development for educators should always be to support the participants in becoming better at their craft. That cannot happen if they do not feel moved to implement something new as a result of their learning.

Each person shows up with a variety of unique characteristics. They have different backgrounds, beliefs, and values. They are in different places with their familiarity with the material and ideas being covered during the training. They have complex intersectional identities that they may or may not think about. For example, one participant shared: “I had an a-ha moment with the skin you are in. It was really eye opening for me and I was shocked at the things I felt had to be ‘a part of me’.” They are at different places with their willingness to learn and share. Like students in a classroom, educators in a PD require differentiated instruction to

make learning meaningful. There is a danger here to conceptualize differentiated PD as separate PD. It is not that. The diversity of voices at the table is part of what makes it productive.

Separating participants out by “skill level” would harm the overall quality of the activities.

Rather, a facilitator must determine how to meet each participant where they are at and build a bridge for them to be part of the whole. This may point to a problem with professional development facilitated by outside providers, especially in the area of self-reflection. If you are asking folks to take a hard look at themselves, it may matter greatly if they know and trust the person guiding the experience.

Some examples of differentiated curation include knowing each participant and using that knowledge to group them for small group work. In the case of conversations about identity, it is key to have multiple identities at the table. In this professional development, for example, small groups were composed with attention to balancing gender, race, age, role, parent/non-parent, and a few other factors. Several participants noted that they worked with people they might never have otherwise spoken to, and definitely not paired up with for PD. Here it is essential to consider personality types as well (more on that finding in the next paragraph). For example, if a facilitator is aware of someone who takes up a lot of airtime in conversations, they should be thoughtfully grouped with a colleague who has demonstrated comfort with reminding peers of the norms and holding group mates accountable for their participation. Positional power should also be considered, as some participants may feel less inclined to participate if they have a direct supervisor potentially judging them. How to place the members of leadership in groups is an important consideration. It is important that this type of learning be done by all, though, so they should not be able to opt out as a solution for the dynamics of positional power. They might productively lead by example, by being vulnerable first. Leaders can only ask staff to do what

they themselves are willing to do, so this part of the curation is important. It is likely useful to have one on one conversations with some key participants ahead of time to prepare them for their roles and models and guides.

One adventitious finding that came from this theme was the realization that personality types are useful points of discussion layered with intersectional identities. A specific example of this was stumbling on the different experiences based upon who self-identified as an introvert and who as an extrovert. While the material of professional development was focused on identity categories like race, gender, sexuality, class, etc., layering on a variety of personality type instruments have the added benefit of identifying additional factors for how educators show up in their work. Furthermore, examining identities through that lens helps ensure that other identity categories will not be essentialized. For example, at the risk of oversimplifying this, it will not be implied or interpreted that all straight, middle class, white women show up the same. Yes, acknowledging intersectionality in itself resists the risk of essentializing individuals based upon a particular identity category. But this research suggests that layering personality types onto that adds an additional and productive element.

*Facilitated Connection:* When engaging in professional development that unpacks identity, examines bias, and promotes self reflection, trust is a prerequisite. Especially for those who are reluctant to tackle this material, having a safe space to do so is critical. Therefore, building the connections within the community should be work that is done before and during the training. Being online was a limitation of this study. One of the recurring experiences of participants was wishing there was more opportunity for dialogue and collaboration, but not necessarily wishing for more screen time. It is the belief of the researcher that meaningful connection can be built online, but this particular series did not emphasize that and therefore a common experience of

participants was feeling disconnected. One of the organizations mentioned in the literature review was the National Equity Project. They are tackling this challenge, and describe their own workshops on similar topics: “We are intensely focused on humanizing our virtual spaces. We focus on interactivity and connection (these workshops are not webinars), frequent screen and body breaks, and attending to learning, practice, and healing in community with people around the world.” There is something to be learned from others engaged in the work of creating meaningful connections in online collaborative spaces while taking on these topics.

*Ongoing Application:* Moving theory to practice is a challenge. As a result, it is only one part of the equation to engage in professional development around identity, bias, and critical self reflection. If the ultimate goal is to create equitable opportunities and outcomes for students, the perspectives gained from professional development must make their way into classroom spaces. Also, learning is made meaningful through application. Therefore, part of the PD plan must be strategies for implementing new learning. Educators participating in this study expressed the need for more intentionality around subsequent PD and support for application. Only those that reported already being engaged in this work at the beginning of the training reported that they felt they were applying it in their daily practice through the way they build relationships or the materials they select for lessons.

*Reciprocal Accountability:* The researcher heard repeated references to frustration with colleagues for a variety of reasons. Some mentioned ableist language others mentioned concern over relationship building or lack thereof. Another mentioned a sense that colleagues were not appearing to be engaged during PD sessions, giving the perception that they did not value the work that the team was engaged in. In every instance none of the educators reported speaking directly to the source of the frustration. This despite the fact that one of the working norms for

the group is “go to the source.” This norm asks people to address points of contention directly with colleagues rather than letting it fester by going unaddressed, or by complaining to another colleague or other third party. It became apparent to the researcher that more work needed to be done to create a culture where these seemingly high stakes conversations can take place in an environment that feels psychologically safe.

*Expanding Self-awareness:* What happens when an educator's view of themselves is quite different from the perspective that others have of them. What happens when they interpret their own actions as culturally proficient while others detect microaggressions and implicit bias? The researcher determined this to be the case in several instances, and wondered what the feedback cycle might look like to support the building of self-awareness. There is also the question of whose perspective gets counted as most accurate? This theme is directly linked to the theme of reciprocal accountability, since it seems the productive learning occurs in conversation, not when one “authority” either approves or disapproves of an individual’s words or actions.

### **Finding Interpretation**

One important finding is for the need to practice and receive feedback on new learnings. For example, when bringing awareness to Discourse I and II, it is insufficient to engage in an activity that surfaces it and then never return to the topic. This new lens must be used regularly and honed. It was noted that there was also a need for feedback and reciprocal accountability. Creating a safe space for educators to point out to each other when they may be slipping into bad habits of speaking through a deficit model or using Discourse I. Several staff reported that they were more comfortable telling a third party about their frustrations with colleagues' word choice than they were sharing that discomfort directly with the person making the comments.

These five buckets represent key considerations that result from an analysis of the qualitative data collected during this project. While it is not an exhaustive list of takeaways from the study, the five themes represent key steps to take to support professional development when it asks educators to look at themselves, rather than at students or at strategies (the more common topics of professional development).

### **Findings in Context**

The findings of this study are part of much larger conversations about social justice education, cultural proficiency, systems of oppression, and the school-to-prison pipeline. To narrow the focus, scholarship was reviewed in the following fields: psychology with specific attention to the work regarding bias, Critical Race Theory with origins in legal studies and as it has been theorized in relation to education, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a specific approach to addressing the inequitable opportunities and outcomes currently experienced by students in our school systems.

These fields of study were not merely grounding for the research, they were tools in professional development as well. The hypothesis being that if educators know how bias works and start to think about it, talk about it, and know how to notice it, they can be more reflective in their practice and will be less likely to act on their own biases. Similarly, if educators grapple with their own identities, specifically their racial identities, and begin to think about the privileges and property rights (as Critical Race Theory asserts) that come with whiteness, they can again be more reflective about how they show up in their work in relationship to whiteness and racist systems regardless of which individual identity they occupy. It is not surprising that one of the findings of this study was the comfortability educators of color have in talking about these topics as compared to many of their white colleagues, which speaks to the fact that some

people in this society have never been afforded the luxury of opting out of an awareness of their racial identity and contending with what that means for them as they move through the world.

The normalizing of whiteness contributes to a reluctance on the part of some people who identify as white to speak about the implications of racial identity on teacher practice and on student outcomes.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy had yielded many productive conversations and hopeful moments in education scholarship and practice. This study looks at the work the educator must do with themselves prior to being able to implement such pedagogy. Critical self-reflection is another thread in the tapestry of an educational system that heals rather than harms. Sound pedagogy is essential, but so much talk about pedagogy starts with practice and erases the practitioner. This allows some educators the move of pretending to be a neutral being in the dynamic in the classroom. A most glaring example of this comes to mind: The researcher once sat at a table with a student and his 10th grade English teacher. They were discussing the student's failing grade. The teacher repeatedly asserted "School Loop gave you that grade." It shut down discussion, but even more shockingly, it erased the role of the teacher completely. He was just there, minding his business while the student failed. And, the student failed not because of the teacher's decisions about assignments and grading but because some inanimate computer system spit out a percentage. What if a teacher had to look a student in the eyes and say, "It was me. I failed you." We might read "I failed you" in multiple ways. The teacher's acknowledgement of agency might change the conversation and the choices being made. This study was interested in understanding how teachers experience themselves as educators, and as agents in their classrooms. Who are they? How are they showing up? What impact does this have on students? How might they adjust (or not) their practice after some structured self reflection?

## Implications

The results of this project may contribute to improvements in the design of professional development that supports educators' understanding of their own identities and biases and the way they show up in their work as a result. The researcher believed that perhaps one of the reasons widespread progress has not been made when it comes to closing opportunity and achievement gaps may be because educators are not aware of how their identity and bias impact the outcomes in their classrooms. Even when trained in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, for example, the impact of such powerful teaching practices may be lost if the person delivering the instruction is not aware of the biased lens they are looking through or the way their identity impacts student performance. For example, if an educator is unaware of being perceived as intimidating by students, they may not be able to understand the impact these feelings are having on student performance. Additionally, if an educator is unaware of their own positional power, obstacles to learning may go unaddressed. As detailed in chapter two, Critical Race Theory posits that racism is permanent, therefore educators cannot be neutral about issues of race in their teaching practice. Based upon the results of the research, it was clear that many individual educators continue to attempt to present themselves as such. Further questions remain to be answered regarding effective tools for moving educators in such positions from denial to engagement.

Adult Learning Theory offers insight into steps that might be taken to help move attendees towards increased investment in professional development. However, there is specific work to be done around self-reflection and creating a safe space for educators to acknowledge the ways they are implicated in a system that has consistently produced inequitable outcomes for students and repeatedly harmed students of color through disproportionality in discipline practices and

referrals to special education, among other things. While surfacing intersectionality, microaggressions, dominant versus disruptive discourse, the 4 I's of oppression, and other key concepts for engaging in the work, there was evidence of resistance and disengagement among many participants.

Hopefully, several ways forward have been chartered by this research. This work is intended to be in conversation with work already being done by others regarding professional development, work coming from the field of psychology regarding bias and how to contend with it, and work on race and pedagogy. The goal is creating more equitable opportunities and outcomes for students, with the belief that educators must start with the work of understanding who they are as individuals and how they show up in their work.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study that should be kept in mind. First, due to the historical moment in which it was conducted, professional development was required to be online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While future studies might look at the specifics of professional development online and how it could be as effective as in-person sessions, this specific professional development under consideration lacked opportunities for dialogue and community building due to the online format. Participants noted that as a barrier to engagement. Since their lived experience of the series is the data, the experience of feeling disconnected while working on a topic that is so much about interpersonal dynamics is significant.

Another limitation is the context of the school itself. As mentioned previously, the school system encourages risk taking and failure. It posits as its philosophical stance that there are possible better futures and that it is, in part, the responsibility of the school to support a realization of those futures. This stance is not common among schools, and therefore it might be

assumed that educators who choose this system to work in have an inclination to engage with these tough topics and to be comfortable critiquing existing systems and power structures.

### **Conclusion**

Recently, while leading a group of educators through a conversation regarding Restorative Practices and discipline policies, in which the researcher proposed a flipping of the meaning of “zero tolerance” to become zero tolerance for exclusionary practices in our school, a participant’s question called forth a story. This is the story of a student who ended up on the news because he was murdered in broad daylight, on a Sunday afternoon, in the doorway of a corner store. His body then sat for hours, resting against the doorframe, one leg inside the store and one leg sprawled onto the sidewalk. His peers rode by on buses, saw the scene, saw the almost instantaneous social media posts. Later, they saw the news stories. So did his mother. Some of the social media posts expressed sadness, condolences, and hopes that he would “rest in peace” or “rest in paradise.” Still other posts bragged about the killing and celebrated the death. To those people, he was an enemy on the wrong side of a gang war, not a dead child in a doorway.

Reading the comments in online news stories, it was not difficult to find posts that described the death as a “public service homicide.” This is a (repulsive) phrase used to celebrate the killing of someone who is labeled a criminal or “menace to society.” Yet, there was nothing in the stories about this young man to substantiate his being a criminal or a threat to anyone. He was just a young Black man in a marginalized neighborhood, on a street with a reputation for gang violence. That was all the context readers required to jump to the conclusion that the world might be better off without him. His mother, however, disagreed. She described her feelings about his death, stating, “Each day is just another day in a lifetime of heartbreak.” She had him cremated

and wore his ashes in a small vial on a necklace. Her baby, not a picture in a locket but ashes on a chain. She was left to grieve in the context of a society celebrating his death. What does that say about bias and oppression, both internalized and systemic?

But there is more to the story, earlier chapters. This young man was a high school student. He had been identified and labeled as a Special Education student with a qualifying disability of Emotional Disturbance, which is a common “disability” disproportionately attributed to Black children, especially males. Arguments have been made that this is largely due to bias on the part of the educators who interpret student behavior through racist lenses. Nevertheless, he traveled through school with that descriptor. At his first high school, he had a verbal conflict with a staff person who felt threatened by him and a peer. The school called the police, filed a restraining order against him and he spent a short time in a juvenile detention facility. At his second high school, he found some success for two and half years. He participated in a student leadership program that, among other things, presented at a conference on a local university campus. The topic was racial bias and state sanctioned violence. This conference was closely following the murder of Trayvon Martin. The presentation included a consideration of comments people make on news stories about the deaths of Black people at the hands of police, each other, or some vigilante who takes “justice” into their own hands. Ironically, he would become the subject of such news stories.

In the fall of his senior year, a locker of a female student was searched after a teacher reported that she thought she could smell marijuana coming from the locker. A backpack was taken from the locker. Inside was a bag of marijuana and a gun. The name on school work in the backpack connected it to this student, not the female student whose locker it was. She would not comment on the backpack, its contents, or its ownership. She was sent home, suspended pending an

investigation. The police were called. The student was not on campus. The next morning, the student arrived on campus and agreed to turn himself in, though he did not comment on the contents of the backpack either. He sat in the Dean's office and waited for the police to arrive. They did. They handcuffed him and led him out of the school, all the way from the second floor office where he had quietly waited for them, through the main hallways of the first floor, out the front door, and into the patrol car waiting outside. He spent more time in a juvenile detention facility.

Upon his release, expulsion proceedings were initiated against him and he appeared at a hearing with his mother. The Dean made the case for prohibiting his return to school based upon the danger he posed. His case manager from the Special Education department made the case that he should be allowed to return. An advocate from the juvenile court system also spoke up on his behalf. He was expelled and offered enrollment at the County Court school but he never attended another day of school. He died in a corner store doorway. His was a life lived through the exclusionary practices of educators and the push out model operationalized by so many school systems. When contemplating the urgency of the topic of bias in education, it should be considered a life or death matter. The inequitable outcomes that inspired the original question for this research do not only take the form of test scores and future earning potential. Inequitable outcomes include bodies in the streets. And, if the dots were to be connected, schools, and the educators that work in them, are implicated in that story.

There are likely many actions that should be taken to change the ending of these stories. For this study, the specific action under consideration was professional development, and how educators might be supported to understand how they show up in their own work, to become aware of the lenses they look through. To begin to unpack the potential efficacy of one attempt at

such a PD session, the researcher posed the question: In what ways might intentional professional development about identity, bias, and critical self-reflection impact the beliefs and behaviors of a community of educators? While there is much more work to be done on this topic, the key findings of this research were the need for differentiated curation, facilitated connection, ongoing application, reciprocal accountability, and expanding self-awareness. Integrating these steps into professional development that asks educators to consider their own identities and biases and to engage in critical self reflection may likely be experienced as meaningful by a wider range of participants.

Individual educators enter professional development spaces at different places with their own willingness to learn and relationship to the material being presented. Facilitators cannot change that fact. It is in the hands of the facilitators to create an optimal learning environment for the PD participants. The findings of this study will hopefully help with that endeavor. The goal, after all, is not PD for its own sake. Professional development is the opportunity to build the capacity for educators to create equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. To achieve this, starting with an understanding of themselves and what they bring to the space is critical. Perhaps this will lead to healing and even life-saving educational spaces.

## References

- Aguilar, Elena. (2016). *The art of coaching teams: Building resilient communities that transform schools*. San Francisco; Jossey-Bass.
- American Psychological Association. (2017). *Education and socioeconomic status*.  
[American Psychological Association](https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education)  
 [\(https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education\)](https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education)
- Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2016). *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Banks, Joy. (2017). “These people are never going to stop labeling me”: Educational experiences of African American male students labeled with learning disabilities. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 50 (1), 96-107.
- Boykin, A. Wade, & Noguera, Pedro. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD.
- Brown, A. (2017). From subhuman to human kind: Implicit bias, racial memory, and black males in schools and society. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 0 (0), 1-14.
- Coatson, J. (2019) The intersectionality wars. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>
- Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositions and others: A plea for narrative. *Michigan Law Review*, 87(8), 2411-2441. <https://doi:10.2307/1289308>
- Diangelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. (2007). *Gangstas, wankstas, and ridas: Defining, developing, and supporting*

- effective teachers in urban schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(6), 617-638.
- Eberhardt, J. L., et al. (2004). Seeing black: Race, crime, and visual processing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(6), 876-893. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.6.876>
- Eubanks, E., Parish, R., and Smith, D. (1997). Changing the discourse in schools. *Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism: Policy and Practice*. New York: Garland.
- Freire, Paulo. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th anniversary edition*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Ginwright, S. A. (2010). *Black youth rising: Activism and radical healing in urban America*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goff, P. et al. (2008a). The space between us: Stereotype threat and distance in interracial contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94 (1), 91-107.
- Goff, P. et al. (2008b). Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94 (2), 292-306.
- Goff, P. et al. (2014). The essence of innocence: Consequences of dehumanizing black children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106 (4), 526-545.
- Guerra, P. L. and Nelson, S.W. (2009). Changing professional practice requires changing beliefs: educators must address underlying beliefs if we hope to significantly improve learning for culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 90 (5), 354-359.
- Hale, G. (1998). *Making whiteness: The culture of segregation in the south, 1890-1940*. New

- York: Random House.
- Hall, P. M. (1997). Changing the discourse in schools. In *Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism: Policy and Practice*. New York: Garland.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. New York: Routledge.
- Horton, M. (1998). *The long haul*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Irving, D. (2014). *Waking up white and finding myself in the story of race*. Cambridge: Elephant Room Press.
- King, J. (1991). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and miseducation. *Journal of Negro Education*. 60(2), 128-132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295605>
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.
- Knowles, M. S. 1., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.) Oxon: Routledge.
- Kohli, R. (2014). Unpacking internalized racism: Teachers of color striving for racially just classrooms. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 17 (3), 367-387.
- Kolb, D. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (Summer, 1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34 (3), 159-165.
- Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate., W. (Fall, 1995). Toward a critical race theory of education.

- Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.) San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). *Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a the remix*. Harvard Education Review. 84 (1), 74-84.
- Lavert, S. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3), 21-35.
- Lindseth, A. & Norberg, A. (2004). A phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 18(2), 145-153.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2004.00258.x>
- Lindsey, R., et al. (2019). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders* (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Marcucci, O. (2019). Implicit bias in the era of social desirability: Understanding antiblackness in rehabilitative and punitive school discipline. *The Urban Review*. 52, 47-74.
- Maloney, T. et al. (2019). Preparing and supporting teachers for equity and racial justice: Creating culturally relevant, collective, intergenerational, co-created spaces. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*. 41 (4-5), 252-281.
- Mertler, C. (2019). *Introduction to educational research* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mezirow, J. et al. (2009). *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (1st ed.) San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Noguera, P. (2008). *The trouble with black boys ...and other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Noguera, P. & Wing, J. (2006) *Unfinished business: Closing the racial achievement gap in our schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Peters, G. (2016). *How can we bridge the culture gap? Stages of change outline a path toward equity*. *The Learning Forward Journal*, 37 (5), 12-22.
- Roediger, D. (1991). *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. New York: Verso.
- Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Tatum, B. (1992). Racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 1-24.
- Vaught, S. and Castagno, A. (2008). "I don't think I'm a racist": Critical race theory, teacher attitudes, and structural racism. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*. 11 (2), 95-113.
- Vella, J. (1994). *Learning to listen, learning to teach: The power of dialogue in educating adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Vella, J. (2016). The power of dialogue in adult learning. *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*. 36, 96-101.
- von Frank, V. (2010). Coaches root out deep bias. *The Journal of Staff Development*. 31(4), 20-25.
- Waitoller, F. and Thorius, K. (2016). Cross-pollinating culturally sustaining pedagogy and universal design for learning: Toward an inclusive pedagogy that accounts for dis/ability. *Harvard Education Review*. 86 (3), 366-389.
- Weissglass, J. (1990). Constructivist listening for empowerment and change. *The Educational Forum*, 54(4), 351-370.

Woodson, C. (1990). *The mis-education of the negro*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.