UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY IN SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS: THE

IMPACT OF CULTURALLY PROFICIENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY IN SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS: THE IMPACT OF CULTURALLY PROFICIENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), minority populations are increasing significantly and are predicted to become the majority nationwide by 2024(Kena et al., 2015). Frankenberg & Orfield (2012) explain that suburban schools are struggling with the realization that their schools are more racially/ethnically and socio-economically diverse. Further difficulties arise when teachers see race, ethnic or socio-economic differences from a deficit point of view, one where a child's culture, home life and perspectives are viewed negatively (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

 Lack of cultural understanding leads educators to underappreciate family and cultural belief systems as well as academic potential of minority students (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). As a result, districts are failing to close the achievement gap that exists between white students and minority students and students in poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Extended training in culturally responsive teaching is necessary to shift a deficit mindset to one of full appreciation and advocacy for what students' race and socio-economic status add to the classroom (Ebersol, Kanahele-Mossman & Kawakami, 2015; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role of professional learning in developing cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional practices that are responsive to the needs of racially and ethnically diverse student groups and students of poverty. Through the lens of cultural proficiency (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009), and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011) the researcher used a phenomenological approach to research and conducted interviews with a district administrator/coordinator of professional development, a principal, eleven teachers (elementary and/or middle school and/or high school) in three suburban districts in upstate New York.

The findings of this study reveal that professional development was aimed at increasing educators' sensitivity and responsiveness toward English Language Learners, special education students, people of color and families living in poverty. Interview narrative revealed that these districts adhered to most tenets of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning by partnering with teachers to develop job imbedded, ongoing professional development offered in a variety of formats with internal and external expertise.

Educators in these suburban districts, trained in cultural proficiency, were dedicated to increasing the likelihood of school readiness and creating opportunities to share and celebrate cultural differences. All three districts plan to continue to provide professional development that breaks down implicit bias, provides best practices for low SES students, special education students and ELLs.

Key Words: Cultural Proficiency, Diversity, Poverty, Suburban School Districts, Professional Development

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background and Overview of the Study

Suburban communities are experiencing changing demographics in race, ethnicity and poverty levels. Suburban schools were once made up of a white student majority and known for their successful achievement rates, large numbers of students attending college and overall high-quality offerings and outcomes (Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011). However, the suburbs have diversified beyond "racially, economically and socially homogenous" communities and, in many cases, are struggling to meet the needs of all their residents (Mikelbank, 2004, p. 940). These changes call for educators to become cultural responsive in their teaching practices and system policies (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Within the last ten years, the shifting demographics have brought about an increasingly diverse student body (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2013). The Brookings Institute reports a nationwide change in suburban population from 1990-2010 with a decline in the white population in suburban communities from 81% to 65%. The most significant increase during this timeframe was among the Hispanic population which increased from 8% to 17% and smaller increases among the African American population from 7% to 10%. (Frey, 2011). The change in suburban demographics also includes an increase in students in poverty. According to Kneebone and Berube (2013), in 2010, 2.9 million more students living in the nation's suburbs were participating in free and reduced- price lunch (FRPL) programs for economically challenged families. This was a

22 percent increase in suburban communities from 2005 to 2010. Whereas in contrast, the numbers of FRPL students living in cities increased 8 percent. In another review of national data, Kneebone (2014) reports the number of suburban poor increased by 139% between 2008 and 2012, almost three times the rate of poverty growth in cities.

With suburban demographics growing more racially and economically diverse, school and community leaders find themselves ill- advised in how to best serve their diverse student population (McKay-Wilson, 2014). One of the often-overlooked disparities in how to approach a diverse student population comes from the inherent bias often associated with an overwhelmingly white teaching force (Matias, 2013). Currently, white teachers make up 85% percent of all teachers in the United States and in suburban districts, 87% of teachers are white (Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011). Teachers lacking training in developing cultural competence often impose a color blindness point of view and think it appropriate to ignore or look past racial or socio-economic differences (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Further difficulties arise when teachers see race, ethnic or socio-economic differences from a deficit point of view, one where a child's culture, home life and perspectives are viewed negatively (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Garcia (2002) agrees that educators, even those from diverse backgrounds, often hold negative views or deficit beliefs about minority groups. Lack of cultural understanding leads educators to underappreciate family and cultural belief systems as well as academic potential of minority students (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Extended training in culturally responsive teaching is necessary to shift a deficit mindset to one of full appreciation and advocacy for what students' race and socio-economic status add to

the classroom (Ebersol, Kanahele-Mossman & Kawakami, 2015; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Systemic professional learning is essential to ongoing improvement in student achievement. "School systems that invest in professional learning and build coherence throughout the system demonstrate commitment to human capital development and acknowledge that investment in educator learning is a significant lever in improving student achievement." (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011. p. 14). Principals who are skilled leaders in professional learning models continually prioritize initiatives through a collaborative process. Effective professional development occurs when the principal is a learner, source of feedback and provides time and resources for teachers to engage with each other in an environment of continuous learning (Hord, 2013). As stated by Hord (2013):

> When the school is organized to focus on a small number of shared goals, and
> when professional learning is targeted to those goals and is a collective enterprise,
> the evidence is overwhelming that teachers can do dramatically better by way of
> student achievement (p. 15).

Statement of the Problem

In suburban schools, there is limited evidence that many teachers have had diversity training or developed a sense of cultural competence that informs a shift toward culturally appropriate pedagogy (Ayscue, 2016; Frankenburg & Ayscue, 2013). Instead, suburban teachers often look negatively upon students of color and socio- economically disadvantaged students, articulating their frustration about their behaviors, attitudes, lack of resources and cultural differences that are not typical of middle class white students

and families (Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013). Research indicates that such deficit thinking influences how educators respond to students' behaviors and academic difficulties in the classroom (Engle & Gonzalez, 2014; Spradlin & Parsons, 2008). To counteract deficit thinking about children in poverty and children of color, Engle and Gonzalez (2014) emphasize the need for educators to reflect inward upon their own biases and resulting interactions with children and work toward a culturally proficient system. Terrell and Lindsey (2009) define those with cultural proficiency as those who "are committed to educating all students to high levels through knowing, valuing, and using the students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles within the selected curricular and instructional contexts (p. 22)."

Matias (2013) explains this kind of professional learning and a review of effective instructional strategies for students in poverty and ethnically and racially diverse students is more likely to occur in urban settings. Researchers are calling for suburban teachers to embrace their responsibility to move away from deficit thinking and instead appreciate how cultural beliefs and socio-economic status influences how children learn and can bring a richer experience for all children in the classroom (Ayscue, 2016; Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). This research study stems from the need to explore if and how suburban school districts are developing culturally responsive mindsets among their teachers and creating school cultures that embrace diversity.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role of professional learning in developing cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders, and its impact on instructional practices that are responsive to the needs of racially and ethnically diverse student groups and students of poverty. Through the lens of cultural

proficiency (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009), and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011) the researcher used a phenomenological approach to research and conducted interviews as the primary means of data collection. A district administrator/coordinator of professional development, the principal, eleven teachers (elementary and/or middle school and/or high school) in three suburban districts in upstate New York were interviewed. Quality professional development is defined as training given to building leaders and teachers within the last five years to develop cultural proficiency and effective instructional strategies to assist economically disadvantaged and diverse student groups. Hord (2013) explains, "Effective professional learning happens in a culture of continuous improvement, informed by data about student and educator performance and supported by leadership and sufficient resources" (p.vii).

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?

2. Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning?

3. What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students?

4. In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a cultural proficient system?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the framework for culturally proficient leadership (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009) that requires leaders to reflect upon one's assumptions, beliefs and values about various cultures and people raised in environments different than their own. Culturally proficient educators, as defined by Terrell and Lindsey (2009), are those who value students' cultural backgrounds, languages and learning styles and design instruction, systems and policy that embrace cultural difference. Terrell and Lindsey (2009, p. 23) explain that these educators believe all students must have access to high quality education and are invested in

1. Working from guiding principles.

2. Recognizing a continuum of behaviors.

3. Articulating essential elements for professional conduct regarding service to cultural groups.

4. Identifying barriers to implementing cultural proficiency among educators.

Significance of the Study

Kneebone and Berube (2013) report that suburban schools are not immune to changing diversity trends. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), minority populations are increasing significantly and are predicted to become the majority nationwide by 2024 (Kena et al., 2015). NCES research also reports that New York was one of sixteen states in 2013 with a poverty rate higher than the national average for children 5- 17 years old (Kena et al., 2015). New York State schools report that collectively minority students represent the majority in the student population across the state with an increase in minority students from 47% in 2005/06 to 55% in 2015/16.

The number of economically disadvantaged students also increased in New York State schools over the last ten years from 45% to 54% (NYSED, 2017). Changing demographics in New York, and nationwide, substantiates the need for culturally proficient educators and school systems. Suburban teachers often exhibit deficit thinking toward students of color and socio-economically disadvantaged students, revealing their frustration toward cultural differences or lack of family resources more typical of middle class white children (Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013).

This study was designed to influence the practice of suburban school and district leaders, professional developers and teachers as they face their increasingly diverse student population and the growing rate of children in suburban poverty. Harris-Russell (2014) explains the need for educators to expand their knowledge and pedagogy to reach diverse students, "Teachers and schools need to utilize cultural knowledge, experiences, and a variety of instructional styles that connect with the learning styles of all students in making learning more appropriate for them" (p. 4). Detailed in this study are efforts made by three suburban districts in New York State to improve cultural proficiency among educators by providing professional development to suburban school teachers. Effective cultural proficiency professional development will help educators embrace differences among their students and create teaching practices that are responsive to the experiences of their students and "reflective about his/her practices and cultural assumptions and is aware of the messages imbedded in them" (Coleman, 2014, p.6).

The findings of this study will inform the work of suburban district leaders, principals and teachers as they plan for the needs of a diverse community and work

toward developing a culturally proficient school system through effective professional development for teachers and leaders.

Definition of Terms

1. Cultural competence: Cultural competence is achieved when educators "interact with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences and motivate you to assess your own skills, expand your knowledge and resources and ultimately cause you to adapt your relational behavior" (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010, p. 24).

2. Cultural proficiency professional development: Training that is provided to teachers and educational leaders on topics that include cultural competence, engaging students in poverty and cultural proficiency. (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009)

3. Diversity: Diversity refers to people who exhibit characteristics different from one another that include, "learning style, language, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ability status, ethnicity and culture" (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008, p. 2).

4. Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Hord, 2013): These standards stipulate that professional development with the greatest impact values learning communities focused on continuous improvement, shared responsibility and alignment to pre-established goals.

5. Students in Poverty: Students whose resources are limited:

    based on (1) the federal government's formula for the poverty line, (2) free and reduced-price lunch formulas that vary, or (3) particular categories and

situations people find themselves in because of the amount of monetary and related material capital they have or lack (Milner, 2015, p. 11).

Assumptions

As a result of initial research to determine which districts would meet the criteria of having provided professional development focused on serving students in poverty and/or racially and ethnically diverse students, the researcher assumed that all interview participants had participated in professional development with this focus within the last five years. The researcher assumed that all interviewees gave honest and accurate information during the interview process and to support this assumption, the researcher reviewed the interview protocol at the onset of each interview assuring participants in the study that they could end the interview at any time and that their identities would be held confidential throughout the research process as indicated in the signed confidentiality agreement. Interview participants were also advised that their identity and that of their school would be assigned pseudonyms throughout the reporting process. All participants completed the entire interview protocol without hesitation.

The researcher remained aware that her own professional experiences in a suburban school district and personal biases could influence the way she listened during interviews. She talked with other researchers and professional colleagues in suburban and urban districts to explore potential areas of bias. The researcher then could assume that her suburban experiences would not influence her ability to collect data in an unbiased manner.

Delimitations

This qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted in three suburban schools in upstate New York with the intention of gaining varying perspectives on the quality of cultural proficiency professional development and the impact, if any, it had on instruction and interactions with children in suburban schools. Participants included the district coordinator for professional development, the principal and eleven teachers (elementary and/or middle school and/or high school) from three suburban districts. The researcher interviewed the district coordinator of professional development to gain a district and system perspective on planning, prioritizing, funding and allotting time for culturally proficient professional development as well as the degree to which the district reviews policy from a cultural proficiency lens. Additional interviews with the superintendent and board of education members could have provided greater perspective on priority setting and review of policy yet were outside the scope of this study.

The researcher gained perspective from the point of view of one principal on the changing demographic, its impact on instruction, the school environment and relationships with families, yet was limited to the observations and practices of that principal within his/her building and regarding observations as a member of the leadership team. Further, the principal interview provided an understanding of the effectiveness of professional development provided to school leaders and of the leadership strategies employed, if any, to create a culturally responsive school community. Beyond the scope of this study, additional interviews with other principals within each district could serve to verify the effectiveness of cultural proficiency professional development for school leaders and more fully describe how building

principals set expectations for cultural proficiency practices, model the traits of culturally proficient leaders and monitor growth among staff toward this goal.

Interviews with suburban teachers provided descriptive accounts from their perspective regarding the needs of students in poverty and culturally and ethnically diverse students. Teachers' perspectives revealed an understanding of the types and quality of professional development provided to teachers and the degree to which this professional development influenced their instructional practice and interactions with children. Also evident from the teachers' perspective was an assessment of the effectiveness of their building leader in creating a culturally proficient environment. Because the design of this study called for only four teacher participants from across the entire district, the researcher interviewed teachers in different schools making it difficult to gain multiple accounts of school climate, the practices of teachers and the principal in any one building within the district.

Conducting additional interviews with principals and teachers uniformly from all grade levels could provide a more comprehensive view of the impact of the district's changing population and a systemic implementation of cultural proficiency professional development and systemic change efforts. Further, the researcher could have gained greater insights into the school culture and instructional practices and systems by interviewing students and families from varying cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The focus of this phenomenological research study is limited to suburban schools and provides rich description of professional development and the practices of suburban

teachers, principals and district leaders. This study is less generalizable than a study examining the practices in urban, rural and suburban schools.

Limitations

The researcher's use of the snowball sampling (Creswell, 2014) causes some limitation to this study. The district administrator and building principal tended to recommend teachers who were highly invested in studying culturally proficient practices either having served on committees relevant to this work or in the case of special education teachers, interact most often with high needs children. It was more likely that these participants were more inclined to exhibit culturally proficient viewpoints and practices prior to participating in culturally proficient professional development thus limiting the researcher's ability to determine whether professional development had an impact on their interactions with children.

Organization of the Study

The dissertation is organized in five chapters. Included in Chapter One is an introduction of the research, the background and the significance of the research revealing the need for cultural proficiency professional development in suburban schools as a means of responding to a more diverse suburban population. A description of the changing demographics nationally and in suburban communities, the characteristics typical of students and families in poverty and the approaches used by school systems to address the needs of diverse populations are presented in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two the researcher provides the research about suburban educators' frustrations and lack of instructional knowledge when teaching children of poverty and diverse populations and the characteristics of quality cultural proficiency professional development and

leadership actions in a culturally proficient system. The research methodology and the specific process for collection of data are provided in Chapter Three. The district coordinator for professional development in three suburban districts was interviewed initially and through snowball sampling, principals and teachers were identified as participants for one-to-one, semi- structured interviews. In Chapter Four, the researcher reports the data and themes that emerged, organized by each research question. Descriptive narrative from interviewees is provided with direct quotes. Research findings and associated conclusions and recommendations for teachers, principals and district leaders are explained in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Over the last decade, the population of school-age children in the United States

has grown more diverse (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016). As classroom communities grow

more diverse, scholars agree that children's home and life experiences inform how they

learn and how they interact with other children and adults (Danielson, 2007). Scholars

agree that teachers who actively seek out knowledge of students' cultural heritage and

recognize their backgrounds, either culturally or socio-economically, influence learning

see greater student engagement and higher achievement results (Danielson, 2007; Jensen,

2013). Teachers who actively honor cultural differences and show appreciation for

students' native languages other than English are more successful in reaching students in

a productive learning community. (Danielson, 2007; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker &

Karhanek, 2004). To this end, many school districts are providing professional

development focused on developing culturally competent teachers and culturally

proficient systems. This kind of professional development stipulates that developing

cultural competency is an "inside-out" process (CampbellJones, CampbellJones &

Lindsey, 2010, p. 11) whereby reflecting inward creates a transformation of personal

values and system priorities that will better serve all students (Delpit, 1995).

This qualitative study explores the role of professional learning in developing

cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional

practices that are responsive to the needs of racially, ethnically and socio-economically

diverse student groups. Through the lens of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins &

Terrell, 2009), and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, (Mizell, Hord,

Killion & Hirsh, 2011) this researcher applied a phenomenological approach to research

to conduct interviews with a district leader responsible for coordinating professional

development, a principal, and eleven teachers (elementary and/or middle and/or high

school) in three suburban districts in upstate New York.

       This literature review begins with an examination of the changing demographics

nationally and in suburban communities to establish an understanding of how

communities in the United States are becoming more culturally and socio-economically

diverse. The next section explores characteristics typical of students and families in

poverty as well as efforts made by systems to address these needs. Further research

reveals that suburban districts are under-prepared when facing their changing

demographic and lack instructional knowledge and professional mindset when teaching

children of poverty and diverse populations (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). The characteristics

of quality professional development about cultural proficiency and leadership actions in a

culturally proficient system are also discussed here. The literature includes professional

development offered by districts to shift educator mindset and address the learning needs

of minority students and students in poverty as well as build relationships with their

families. Finally, the barriers faced by many districts working toward creating culturally

proficient educators provide guidance for this study.

Changes to Demography in the United States

       As the overall population of the United States continues to grow, a change in

demographics is occurring. The most current examination shows that from 2000-2013,

the population in the United States has become increasingly diverse in terms of race,

ethnicity, family living arrangements and socio-economic status. For example, the white

population decreased from 69% to 63% of the total population, while the Hispanic

population increased from 13% in 2000 to 17% in 2013. The Black population remained

constant at 12% of the total population. The Asian population increased to 5% of the total

population. (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016).

Table 1

United States Population change from 2000-2013 adapted from Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016 (NCES 2016-007) *(Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016).*
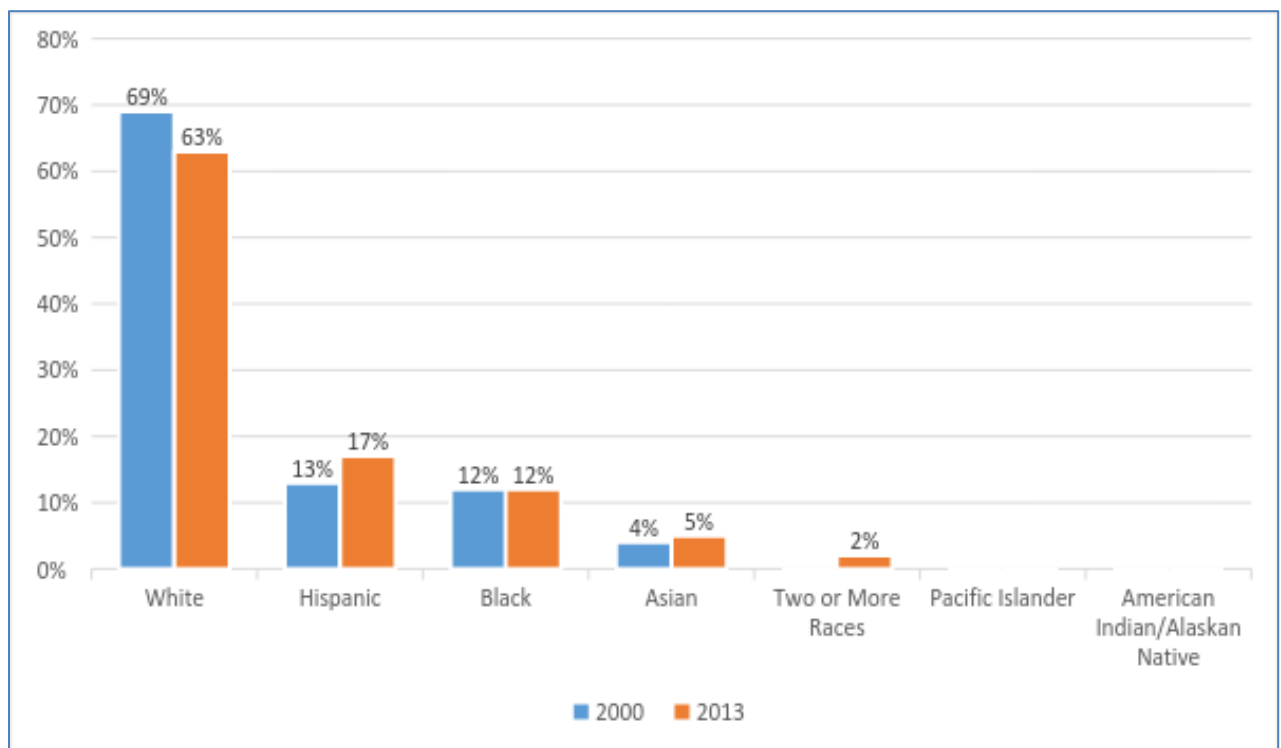
As the overall population is changing in the United States, it is important to

examine the potential future impact on schools. Enrollment projections out to 2024

suggest that that the student population, like the overall population will grow more

diverse. Although white students continued to make up the majority population enrolled

in public schools in 2012, they are predicted to shift to a minority population by 2024.

(Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016). The 2016 report, *Status and Trends in the Education of*

Racial and Ethnic Groups, as noted in Table 2, found that from 2012 to 2024, the percent of White children enrolled in public school in the United States is likely to decrease to 46% in 2024 while the percent of Black children will decrease at a smaller rate to 15%. Children of most other races attending public school are projected to increase somewhat significantly by 2024: Hispanics to 29%; Asian/Pacific Islander 6%; Two or More Race to 4% while American Indian/Alaska Natives children enrolled in public school is likely to stay the same at 1% (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016).

Table 2

 United States Population predicted change from 2012 -2024, adapted from Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016 (NCES 2016-007) *(Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016).*
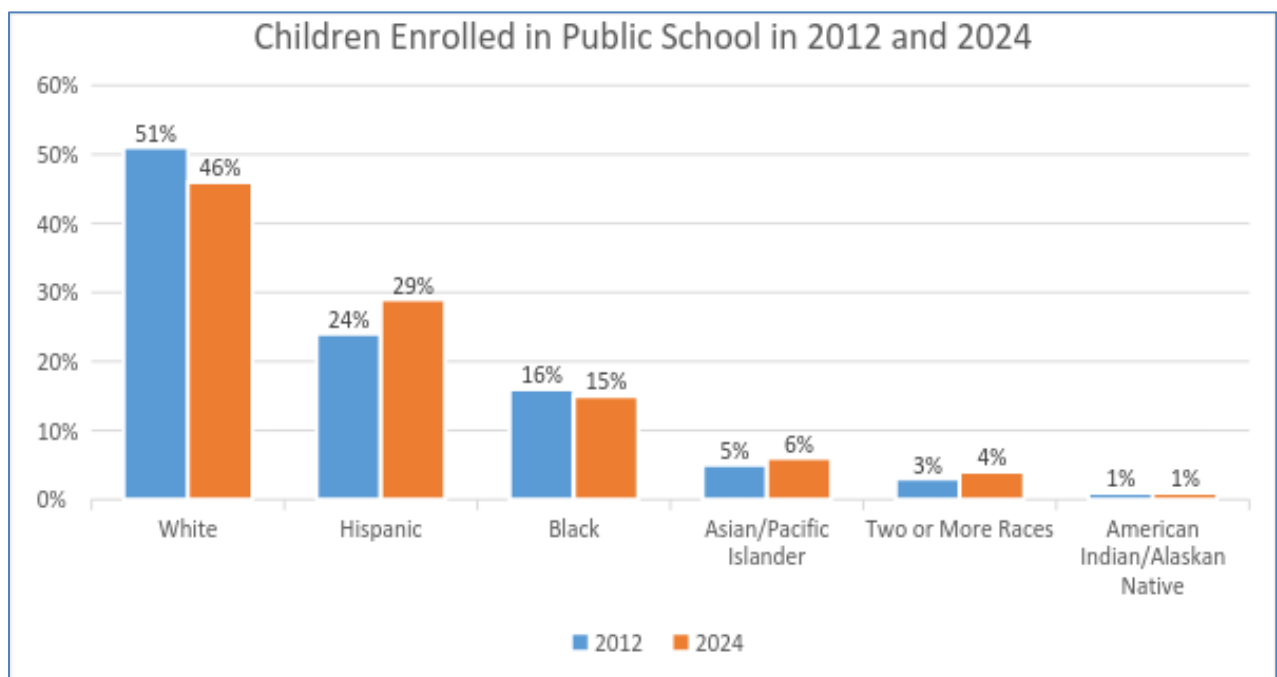
Diversity goes beyond a student's skin color and ethnic heritage. A child's family background and living experiences greatly influence learning. In 2013, although the majority (63%) of children lived in households with married parents, a significant number of children live within a single parent home (35%) and many children live in

households where grandparents or nonrelatives serve as guardians (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016).

Researchers Murphy & Allard (2015), define poverty in terms of financial income:

> Based on (1) the federal government's formula for the poverty line, (2) free and
> reduced-price lunch formulas that vary, or (3) particular categories and situations
> people find themselves in because of the amount of monetary and related material
> capital they have or lack (Milner, 2015, p. 11).

Although formulas for determining poverty lines change, according to the United States Census Bureau, the poverty line in 2015 was $24,257 for a family of four (Poverty Thresholds, 2016).

In 2013, 19% of school aged children lived in families living in poverty, an increase from 16% in 2000. Black children made up the highest percent of children in poverty at 39 %, an increase from 2000; Hispanic children make up 30% of children in poverty and White and Asian children each make up 10 % (Poverty Thresholds, 2016). Within the next ten years, the population of school age children in the United States is predicted to change from a white majority to a non-white majority (Poverty Thresholds, 2016) and those children will come to school with a wide range of cultural, socio-economic and family living experiences (Tyler, 2016). Tyler (2016) points out that although demographic changes are occurring in rural and urban schools, suburban school districts are shifting to a racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse student body more rapidly than they have seen in the past.

Changes to suburban demography. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics, a suburb is a community located outside a major city and inside a

greater urban area (Kena et al., 2015). A large suburb is one with a population of

250,000 or more. A midsize suburb is one with more than 100,000 and less than 250,000

people and a small suburb is one with less than 100,00 people (Rural Education in

America, 2016). Historically, suburbs were characterized by a homogeneously white,

middle class community whose residents were invested in a quality education. Kneebone

& Berube (2013) recall an historical description of suburbs as "middle-and upper-class

bastions, built as predominantly white, well-off residents moved away from cities,

leaving minority and lower-income populations to deal with growing urban problems and

a shrinking tax base" (p.8) while also stating the need to see the changing complexity of

current suburbs. Frankenberg and Orfield (2012) agree, stating the stereotypical white

middle class suburban life is disappearing and suburbs are becoming a microcosm of

national statistics. Frankenberg and Orfield (2012) write:

> Indeed, the demographics of the suburbs now closely reflect the
>
> composition of the entire nation. Thus, understanding the change that is
>
> happening in the suburbs -- a change that is creating a multiracial diversity
>
> more complex than the racial change of prior generations – is critically
>
> important to understanding change happening in our country (p.17-18).

Suburbs outside large cities find themselves with a new population, one that is

more racially and socio-economically diverse.

Freeman (2010) agrees that unlike suburbs of the past, modern day

suburbs are "complex layers of diversity" (p.677). For example, the student body

of suburban public schools in 2010 was 54% white, 14% black, 23% Hispanic, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, 3% Multiracial (The Status of Rural Education, 2016). The cumulative increase among nonwhite students has caused the percent of white students to decline. The Latino population has grown the most and can be attributed to the changing population in suburbs. (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012). This discussion of the changing suburbs goes beyond race and ethnicity to the changes in socio-economic status of suburban residents.

For many years, most of the discussion about poverty has focused on urban and rural poverty, overlooking the increasing rate of poor families living in suburban areas. Kneebone & Holmes (2014) call attention to suburban areas because although cities and rural areas continue to have high poverty rates, suburban areas are growing more diverse. Kneebone and Berube (2013) state, "By 2012, the suburbs accounted for 56 percent of the poor population in these metropolitan areas, exceeding the number of urban poor by 3.5 million" (p.19).

There are various reasons for this increase. Immigrants who had previously settled in urban areas began to settle in the suburbs in the 1990s and 2000s due to growing employment opportunities, safer communities and better schools (Murphy & Allard, 2015). As a result of federal desegregation efforts, changes in housing laws and programs designed to integrate minority students into white majority schools, suburbs saw an increase in minority populations (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012).

 However, these suburbs, like other areas, struggled during the recession with job loss and mortgage foreclosures (McKay-Wilson, 2012, Murphy &

Allard, 2015). Poverty, new in suburban areas, is the result of traditionally middle or upper -class families who experienced unexpected circumstances resulting in loss of income and other resources associated with wealth. (McKay-Wilson, 2012). Issues of poverty like homelessness, joblessness and hunger often associated with urban locations have reached suburban locations. "Populations living below the federal poverty line grew twice as fast between 1970 and 2010 in suburbs as in cities, and almost three times as fast between 2000 and 2012" (Kneebone & Berube, 2013, p. 19). As pockets of poverty grow in suburban communities, behaviors atypical in middle class neighborhoods, begin to develop. Frankenberg and Orfield (2012) note an increase in crime rates and high school dropout rates contribute to loss of home values and declining businesses.

Researchers note an essential difference between ways urban and suburban communities address issues of poverty (Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Murphy & Allard, 2015). This becomes an important concern of schools who are trying to work with poor children who may have big gaps in knowledge and other school readiness factors. When trying to provide support to poor families, urban centers are more likely to have assistance programs, employment opportunities and accessible transportation (Freeman, 2010). Frankenberg & Orfield (2012) explain that suburban communities lack government policies and programs that support full racial integration and growth of public services in suburbs like those found in urban areas that assist people in poverty.

Studies suggest that there is clearly an absence in "(1) Hardship organizations like shelters and food pantries, which help people meet their daily needs; (2) Employment

organizations that provide services such as job training; and (3) Education organizations,

such as those that operate GED programs" (Murphy & Allard, 2015, p.21). Failure to

recognize and provide for the needs of one's suburban community only makes the life of

the suburban poor more difficult in that they do not know how to navigate or are

embarrassed to navigate social services programs and sometimes lack transportation to

these programs more often found in urban areas (McKay-Wilson, 2012; Desmond, 2015).

Understanding Diversity

Spradlin & Parsons (2008) describe diversity in terms of "individual variations"

that include "learning style, language, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation,

ability status, ethnicity and culture" (p. 2). Lumby & Coleman (2007) explain, "Diversity

is the range of characteristics which not only result in perceptions of difference between

humans, but which can also meet a response in others which may advantage or

disadvantage the individual in question" (p. 1). This definition is inclusive of people with

a wide range of personal backgrounds and circumstances. The benefits of living and

attending school in a diverse community are extensive particularly in helping children

develop friendships with children different than themselves thus challenging stereotypes

and breaking down faulty assumptions (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012, p. 19). Studies

show that students raised in diverse communities and schools are more likely to live and

work productively in integrated multiracial settings in their adult lives (Frankenberg &

Ayscue, 2013; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012), yet Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies

(2007) describe the complexities of embracing diversity in schools.

> We know that differences of race, language, income, religion, sexual orientation,
>
> occupation, ethnicity, class, disability, culture, and nationality create huge

challenges in schools. Long-term residents sometimes resent the newcomers and make them feel unwelcome. Teachers complain in the lounge that they can't even pronounce their students' names. Students separate themselves into warring cliques, leaving teachers wondering how to make connections among them. White, middle-class PTA leaders wonder why no one comes to meetings anymore (p. 114).

Embracing diversity starts with educators recognizing their tendency to stereotype ethnic and minority groups and recognize the harmful effects felt by students. Reasearchers report that although instances of stereotyping and discrimination may not be as blatant as racial slurs or acts of violence toward minority groups in schools, it is still pervasive (Wakefield & Fajardo, 2004; Thompson & Gregory, 2011; Housee, 2012). For example, researchers explain that Asian American students report feeling victimized by the "Model Minority Myth," an unfounded assumption that advances the stereotype that all Asian Americans are high achieving, overly estudious, and inherently smart (Nguyen, 2014, p. 169; Spradlin & Parsons, 2008, p. 98). Some may argue that this assumption is complimentary, yet Doan (2006) reports that many Asian Americans would rather remain silent and suffer in their embarrassment than have their peers and teachers know when they are struggling in school (Doan, 2006).

Other ethnic and racial groups face similar instances of stereotyping. For example, Housee (2012) provides research about instances of and responses to Islamaphobia and reveals frequent anti-Muslim commentary faced by Muslim students, particularly those women wearing a hijab. This research emphasizes the need for educators to facilitate discussions about the treatment of Muslim Americans, the effects

of racisim and role of fellow students in responding to racism. Thompson and Gregory's (2011) research describes instances where African American students report unfair treatment by teachers stating that consequences for inappropriate classroom behavior are more lenient for white students than for African American students. Wakefield & Fajardo's (2004) work also reveals circumstances where African American males and Latino adolescents report discrimination at school, sometimes feeling targeted by teachers who are "hyper-vigilent towards their behavior as a result of the participants' racial or ethnic group membership" (n.p.). This unfair treatment raises the frustration level of African American and Latino students and lowers their willingess to engage in class.

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014) reports that black students are suspended or expelled three times more often than their white peers and Native American and Native Alaskan students are suspended or expelled in disproportionate numbers. Native American and Native Alaskan students only make up 1% of the student body yet are suspended at a rate of 2% and expelled at a rate of 3%. Students with disabilities are suspended twice as often as their non disabled peers. Reports of inconsistent treatment, racism and evidence of high suspension rates for people of color serve as a reminder of the assumptions made about or the actions toward some minority group and help to illustrate the need for teachers to reflect upon their interactions with all students and ask themselves:

Do I ask more questions of students from one group or another? Do I tolerate behaviors differentially? Do I use gender-based illustrations and examples? Do I

provide more support, affirmation, or approval for achievement to one group of students than to another? (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008, p. 291).

Understanding Culture

Terrell & Lindsey's (2009) definition of culture goes beyond one's ethnic and racial grouping and instead speaks to the practices and beliefs shared by a group of people that sets them apart from other groups. A full understanding of culture examines "all characteristics of human description including age, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, ancestry, religion, language, history, sexual orientation, physical and mental level of ableness, occupation and other affiliations." (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009, p. 16) Researchers agree that beliefs and behaviors of all individuals are culturally constructed (Gay, 2010) and that depending upon language patterns, family upbringing, family traditions and experiences, it is possible for one person to adhere to the cultural norms of several groups. (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009).

Many researchers agree that understanding diversity and culture will allow for greater teacher effectiveness and increased achievement in schools (Gurung, 2009; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; Cooper, He, & Levin, 2011, 2011; Ayscue, 2016). Gurung (2009) establishes that learning about culture is critical for all people, not just members of the cultural majority. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) explain that most school cultures adhere to actions, behaviors, traditions, policies and daily activities that are more closely aligned to a traditional white, middle class mindset. It is not surprising then that people of various cultures or socio-economic circumstances do not necessarily fully understand the routines and expectations of schools. Navigating school systems becomes challenging for children and families when their personal work habits and

academic expectations are based on cultural norms different from those of the school system (Jensen, 2009). Further complications can surface with children of low SES because associated health issues, cognitive delays and social emotional difficulties can cause them to struggle academically and have trouble forming positive relationships in school (Gurung, 2010; Jensen, 2009). This often creates tension filled and unproductive relationships among educators, children and their families.

Understanding Poverty

Suburban communities are changing and that in many instances, educators are struggling to adjust to the increased numbers of suburban children in poverty. McKay-Wilson (2012) writes that suburban teachers are struggling to accept that suburbs now face the difficulties more often found in urban schools in light of the increased numbers of impoverished students.

Very often suburban educators are not familiar with the needs and learning styles of poor children. Milner (2015) explains that if educators have not "lived in poverty, experienced racism or other forms of discrimination" (p.31) or participated in reform movements aimed to help marginalized populations, it is very difficult for them to understand how to bring about change in these types of systems. Adding to the difficulty, suburban districts have not set up necessary support systems,

> Without the safety net of social services that city governments provide for the urban poor, suburban schools have had to scramble to set up programs that address basic needs, such as adequate food and clothing, for their students from low-income families (McKay-Wilson, 2012, p. 42).

Further complicating potential progress, suburban district leaders are sometimes at fault for minimalizing the needs of its changing demographic because school boards and political and community leaders do not want to speak publicly about what poverty and diversity look like in their community (Gill, Posamentier, & Hill, 2016). Educators must continually remind themselves that not all children reside in middle class families and share lifestyles like their middle-class teachers. (Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011).

In *Teaching with Poverty in Mind,* Jensen (2009) cites research studies examining different characteristics of those students in poverty versus those of higher socio-economic status. To assist teachers in better understanding low socio-economic students, Jensen (2009) describes six types of poverty. An unexpected and often temporary circumstance causes *situational poverty*, sometimes due to job loss, health issue or regional catastrophe. *Generational poverty* includes those who have been in poverty for two or more generations often resulting in an attitude of entitlement. People in *absolute poverty* are purely surviving each day struggling to find the basics of housing, running water and food whereas those in *relative poverty* find themselves unable to financially meet "society's average standard of living" (Jensen, 2009, p. 6). *Urban* versus *rural poverty* distinguishes between the difficulties faced in different geographical locations. Impoverished people in urban settings find stress in over -crowding, violence and frenzy while depending upon accessible yet inadequate social services. Stressors in rural communities include lack of employment and difficult accessibility to social services, healthcare and transportation (Jensen, 2009).

Desmond (2015) extends the definition of poverty into three categories and in doing so illuminates the systemic nature and multilayered aspects of poverty. At the simplest level, *acute hardship* refers to those living below the poverty line due to lack of vital resources and essential material belongings (Desmond, 2015). Next, *compounded hardship*, by its definition, recognizes the complexity of poverty within systems and institutions. Compounded hardship reveals the impact of educational systems, incarceration structures, mental health issues, employment programs and approaches to housing on the life of those in poverty. Furthermore, *persistent hardship* speaks to the long- lasting effects of early-life trauma, abuse, hunger and violence such that only through incredible resiliency are people able to overcome the depths of poverty and rejoin society's behavioral norms (Desmond, 2015).

Ruby Payne's (2005) work, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, points out common characteristics shared by people in poverty including social and emotional responses to problem solving, lack of persistence, communication patterns and behavioral norms. Many educators relate to the characteristics described by Payne (2005) and as a result have adjusted their approach with children of poverty (Gorski, 2013). In *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty*, Gorski (2013) takes issue with Payne's (2005) "culture of poverty" (p. 62) mindset suggesting that it encourages stereotypes associated with people of poverty and leads to a deficit view, one where educators view children of poverty with inherent behaviors and attributes too difficult to overcome causing inevitable failure in their classrooms. Instead, Gorski (2013) examines the number of obstacles poor families must overcome and the difficulties they face meeting the expectations of school communities due to lack of resources. Researchers (Tileston &

Darling, 2008; Gorski, 2013; Freeman, 2010) agree that those in poverty are at risk for "emotional and social challenges; acute and chronic stressors; cognitive lags; health and safety issues" (Jensen, 2009, p. 7).

      Children in poverty. Researchers agree behaviors typical of children growing up in poverty are attention seeking and disruptive behaviors, impulsivity, lack of appropriate social behaviors more typical of middle class, exaggerated emotional responses and lack of empathy for others (Gorski, 2013; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Payne, 2005). Tardiness and absenteeism caused by illness, lack of medical care, insufficient supervision from a parent or lack of immediate transportation when situations arise are also frequent problems for children from low income families (Jensen, 2009).

      Payne (2005) explains several characteristics of poverty are counter-productive in school settings. For example, children in poverty come to understand that discipline at home very often consists of verbal or physical punishment and then a form of forgiveness with kind words, food or other gifts. This kind of 'admonishment then forgiveness' pattern fails to teach children to change behavior, surpass frustration and persevere through difficult circumstances (Payne, 2005). It also causes confusion when children are disciplined at school, as they are expected to learn from it and change the behavior.

      Another learned behavior of people in poverty is that they need to be able to defend themselves physically to survive or protect their loved ones (Payne, 2005). Such behaviors are completely contrary to the norms of educational systems and children of poverty frequently are frustrated by less aggressive strategies used to resolve conflicts in schools. Payne (2005) explains that time out spaces, conflict resolution efforts,

involvement of an outside adult as mediator are viewed as only postponing additional physical altercations.

Howard, Dresser & Dunklee (2009) help educators to better understand the difficulty students of poverty have functioning successfully within the daily demands of school. Teachers make some assumptions about the way children experience routines and activities at home, how families communicate and prioritize tasks related to school and how children are taught to respond to adult expectations and task completion. For example, teachers may take for granted that children have regular meals and that their parents set up a space that supports good work habits when often, meals are provided sporadically, parents are working causing children to be unsupervised and there is little time or resources to support learning. Some teachers assume that children are exposed to a wide variety of activities and events outside of school and that their movement from one event to another is well organized with careful planning and coordination. In many cases, parents' work commitments prevent these kinds of activities and if they are possible, it happens spontaneously or with interruption.

Effective communication, willingness to accept feedback and task completion all contribute to success in school (Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009). Teachers often assume that parents model these traits with their own children from an early age, yet families in poverty live differently due to their circumstances. It is not uncommon for parents' work schedules, health issues and exhaustion to prevent positive interactions with their children. When children lack productive feedback and praise, they often hesitate to speak up, ask questions or have confidence to complete tasks independently. Consequently, Howard, Dresser & Dunklee (2009) explain that children develop a

reluctance to try new things and lack trust that adults will follow through with what they say they will do. Educators need to recognize that a child's lack of trust in adults, failure to complete homework and overall hesitancy to engage in discussion or to ask for and accept help when needed may be the result of general home life instability due to poverty.

Studies find with certainty that children in poverty and schools with high percentages of families in poverty have gaps in achievements and fail to demonstrate academic growth long term compared to their wealthier counterparts (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gorski, 2013). Researchers argue that success in school is directly related to a child's readiness to learn associated with opportunity for educational experiences, supportive environment and social and emotional support (National Education Goals Panel: Special Early Childhood Report, 1997; Gorski, 2013; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009). According to the National Education Goals Panel (1997), school readiness requires: physical well-being and development including proper nutrition, age appropriate fine and gross motor skills; Social and emotional development including the ability to form friendships and work in groups; Supportive environments that encourage curiosity, persistence and risk taking; Language use and vocabulary development; Cognition and problem-solving strategies. Low SES families often do not have time for consistent involvement with reading, homework completion or the financial resources for educational technology and enrichment opportunities.

Much of the research on the impact of trauma on childhood development describes similar deficiencies in readiness to learn (Craig, 2016). Children who have suffered from abandonment, domestic violence, physical or sexual assaults, death of a parent or caretaker, or were subject to other events that would cause post-traumatic stress

often struggle with building trusting relationships, showing empathy, and developing language skills to communicate and develop a sense of self identity and advocacy (Craig, 2016). Children in poverty have often been exposed to traumatic experiences and their parents may have difficulty providing the kind of interactions and support necessary to overcome deficiencies in school readiness (Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009; Jensen, 2009).

Children from low income families tend to struggle with foundational skills such as language acquisition, vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Many of these skills are dependent upon frequent interactions with adults starting at an early age. Parents and caregivers in poverty households tend to have limited vocabularies themselves, read less often to children and lack resources (i.e. Books, interactive toys, computer access, etc.) that promote intellectual growth and problem solving (Jensen, 2009). Intellectual growth depends upon consistent stimulation that may occur through frequent conversation, challenging problem solving, puzzle making and engaging information. Absent these kinds of interactions, children in poverty grow at slower rates (Jensen, 2009; Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

Literacy rates, behavioral responses and attitudes toward school among low SES children have been researched extensively (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007; Jacob & Ludwig, 2009). Research indicates the rate of vocabulary growth impacts later performance in high school and despite efforts for interventions in the earlier grades to boost vocabulary of low SES children, the outcomes of these interventions are short lived (Hart & Risley, 2003). Hart and Risley (2003) studied 42 families from a wide range of income levels for over two years to determine

the environmental impacts on the rate of vocabulary growth of four- year - old's. This study found children in a welfare family will have 13 million fewer words than that of a working -class family and 33 million words fewer than a professional family (Hart & Risley, 2003). This research further highlights literacy deficits faced by low SES children and draws attention to other cognitive difficulties. "Cognitively, experience is sequential: Experiences in infancy establish habits of seeking, noticing, and incorporating new and more complex experiences, as well as schemas for categorizing and thinking about experiences" (Hart & Risley, 2003, p.9). As a result of these cognitive processing difficulties, students from low SES households struggle with knowledge of numbers, copying and use of symbols (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007).

Children living in poverty have greater difficulty concentrating and working cooperatively (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007). Interpersonal behaviors can be associated with interactions typical in low income homes. Low- income mothers tend to be less responsive and sensitive with interacting with their children (Barrett & Turner, 2005). Hart & Risley (2003) found the average child in a welfare family receives far less positive feedback with only one affirmative comment to two discouraging comments compared to 12 affirmative comments and seven discouraging comments in a working - class family (Hart & Risley, 2003). Positive feedback builds self-confidence and helps children understand when they are on the right track with their behavior, attitudes and academic progress (Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009).

Impact of Diversity and Poverty on Student Achievement

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, about 21% of children in the United States live in families whose total income would be considered below the

federal poverty line (Poverty, 2017). For example, in 2015, a family of four earning less

than $24,250 annually is considered living below the poverty line (Annual Update, 2015).

Research suggests that living in poverty during early childhood is associated with lower

than average academic performance that begins in kindergarten and extends through high

school, leading to lower than average rates of school completion. (Musu-Gillette, et al.

p.20, 2016).

        Frankenberg & Orfield (2012) explain that suburban schools are struggling with

the realization that their schools are more racially/ethnically and socio-economically

diverse. Their faculty and staff lack training to teach in a diverse community and they

have fiscal constraints limiting implementation of new programs and upgrade facilities to

meet their new needs (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012). As a result, districts are failing to

close the "achievement gap" commonly understood as a "gap in academic achievement

persists between minority and disadvantages students and their white counterparts"

(Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3).

        In New York State, "ninety-three percent of students in failing schools are

students of color and 82% of these students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch"

(The State of New York's Failing Schools 2015 Report, 2015). Review of New York

State 3-8 ELA and Mathematics assessment results in 2015-16 (Table 3) show

performance by economically disadvantaged children was far lower than their wealthier

peers (NYS 3-8 Assessment Database, 2015). For example, 31% of economically

disadvantaged 3rd graders achieved proficiency in ELA compared to 59% of not

economically disadvantaged children; 33% of economically disadvantaged 3rd graders

achieved proficiency in Math compared to 61% of not economically disadvantaged

children. With the exception of 8th graders, more than 20% of wealthier students

outperformed students of lower SES.

Table 3

Percent of students achieving at Level 3 and Level 4 on NYS assessments in ELA and Math in 2014-15. (NYS 3-8 Assessment Database, 2016)

Grade	ELA		Math	
	Economically Disadvantaged	Not Economically Disadvantaged	Economically Disadvantaged	Not Economically Disadvantaged
3	31	59	33	61
4	30	57	33	62
5	23	48	28	57
6	25	48	28	57
7	25	49	25	51
8	31	54	19	33

Similar disparity is evident when comparing performance rates of minority

students compared to white students in grades 3- 8. Although Asian or Pacific Islander

students surpass white students in achieving proficiency in ELA and Math, this is not the

case with black, African- American, Hispanic, Multiracial and American Indian students.

Indicated in Table 4, in the case of 3rd grade ELA, 51% of white students reached

proficiency whereas 35% of American Indian, 31% Black or African American, 30% of

Hispanic or Latino and 45% of Multiracial students reached proficiency. A similar gap

between white and minority students' achievement in ELA and Mathematics can be

found across grades 3-8 (NYS 3-8 Assessment Database, 2015).

Table 4

Percent of students achieving at Level 3 and Level 4 on NYS assessments in ELA and Math in 2015-16
(NYS 3-8 Assessment Database, 2016)

	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Am. Ind./Alaska Native	35	35	36	38	25	31	25	28	28	25	29	16
Black/African American	31	30	30	28	23	23	23	23	23	19	28	14
Hispanic or Latino	30	31	30	31	23	26	23	25	24	22	30	16
Asian or Pacific Islander	61	68	62	70	53	67	57	69	57	66	63	54
White	51	55	49	56	41	52	42	52	44	47	50	29
Multiracial	45	48	44	49	37	43	42	47	41	42	41	22

These statistics substantiate the need for educators to reflect upon their biases, evaluate their practices and invest in developing a better understanding about how diversity and poverty influence learning and the ability to succeed in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Tileston & Darling (2008) remind educators to develop an understanding of the cultures of the children they teach and appreciate its influence on them and their families.

> As educators join forces with sociologists, behaviorists, and researchers, the question has become, 'Is it culture or poverty that creates the discrepancies in achievement among groups that we find in the classroom today?' Studies indicate that it is not culture of poverty, but culture and poverty. A preponderance of evidence from these studies indicates that we need to look at culture first and then at the circumstances of children living in poverty. Why culture first? If we truly want to raise the learning levels of our students, we must first know the culture from which they come. We must know how that

culture learns, the value it places on education, and how, within that culture,

motivation is triggered (Tileston & Darling, 1008, p.7).

Deficit Thinking

Engle and Gonzalez (2014) call upon teachers and school leaders to recognize

their biases and realize that they often take on a deficit view, one that sees the qualities

racially, ethnically and socially economically diverse students and their families bring the

learning environment in a negative light. Spradlin & Parsons (2008) explain that many

educators often view minority students negatively and cast off their parents as

disinterested and irresponsible. Similar frustrations, beliefs and attitudes regarding

children in poverty influences how educators treat students of poverty, set expectations

for their achievement and manage their behaviors (Robinson, 2007).

Teachers who are frustrated that students of poverty are not coming to school

with the same degree of readiness as their wealthier peers often take a deficit view of

their potential to learn. (Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009). They buy into the myth that

low SES students who struggle, fail to do their homework or fail to score at grade level

on standardized tests are lazy, do not care about school and are not capable of reaching

high expectations (Gorski, 2013). Sato & Lensmire (2009) argue "children from poverty

are being identified and labeled with grossly overgeneralized, deficit-laden characteristics

that put them at risk of being viewed as less capable, less cultured and less worthy as

learners" (p.365). Gorski (2013) cautions educators about the need to see poor people as

diverse, coming from different circumstances and cultural norms.

Teachers who are highly attuned to their own deficit thinking and consider the

potential causes of their students' struggles are less likely to make judgements about

whether students care about school. It is important for educators to see the assets all students, including those from poor or minority families, bring into the classroom and value them as intellectual people (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Although the experiences of low SES children may be different from their middle-class educators, Sato & Lensmire (2009) explain the value in understanding that children bring their home culture into the classroom and instead of devaluing it, find ways to build from those experiences, whatever they may be. Educators often mistakenly assume middle class language use, social interactions and academic habits are automatically understood. Instead, they need to shift their view of students of poverty from disappointment and frustration to appreciating their difference and a willingness to teach and foster academic mindset and behaviors for all children. (Sato & Lensmire, 2009; Jensen, 2009).

Overcoming deficit thinking happens when teachers are interested in looking inward and challenging their own biases and assumptions. "As we check our own biases, we must be open minded and see the assets that our students bring to school- and be willing to accept them, value them and allow them to floursidh in our schools" (Engle & Gonzalez, 2014, p. 36).

Addressing Issues of Poverty

Gorski (2013) argues the first step in addressing issues of poverty is to resist the deficit viewpoint and instead choose a resiliency perspective, one where educators focus on the strength of low SES students and families. Researchers agree that closing the achievement gap for children in poverty is a complex issue and identify four essential efforts successful districts do to address it. (1) establishing rigorous academic expectations rather than dummying down the curriculum is essential. (2) maintaining

positive, supportive relationships with children and families. (3) re-examining school structures that create barriers for low SES families. (Jensen, 2009; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009; Gorski, 2013).

High poverty schools who invest in hiring high quality teachers, support instructional needs and create working conditions that encourage them to stay in high poverty schools have seen greater degrees of achievement gains (Morgan, 2012; Almy & Tooley, 2012). Additional efforts that result in higher achievement for students in poverty include: smaller class size; developing relationships with community agencies; sustained professional development on teaching low income children and families; extending health services at school; protecting time for physical education, recess, arts and music; and advocating for libraries in impoverished neighborhoods (Jensen, 2009).

Milner (2015) calls educators to shift their teaching practices emphasizing the need to, "infuse language arts across the curriculum; build and sustain meaningful relationships; develop teachers' knowledge and skills beyond academic content; teach and cultivate student social, organizational, and study skills" (p. 78). Jensen (2009) agrees that shifts in instruction are essential providing teachers action steps to build core skills that encompass cognitive and social emotional skills. Jensen (2009) identifies the following core skills: "Attention and focus skills; short and long-term memory; sequencing and processing skills; problem-solving skills; perseverance and ability to apply skills in the long term; social skills; hopefulness and self-esteem" (p. 39).

As indicated previously, educators who see their students as individuals, understand that they approach teaching through a lens of personal bias and embrace the different experiences children from varying racial/ethnic and socio-economic

circumstances bring to the classroom, are more likely to create an engaging and successful learning experience. Terrell and Lindsey (2009) provide a cultural proficiency continuum detailing description, action and associated language for each phase from cultural destructiveness, to cultural pre- competence and then to a highly effective cultural proficiency. Districts who achieve cultural proficiency are "committed to educating all students to high levels through knowing, valuing and using the students' cultural background, languages and learning styles within the selected curricular and instructional contexts" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 22).

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

In their cultural proficiency continuum, Terrell & Lindsey (2009) describe behaviors of educators, educational leaders and the characteristics of school systems regarding their approach to cultural difference and its impact on learning. The six stages on the continuum include cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence and cultural proficiency. CampbellJones, CampbellJones and Lindsey (2010) see the cultural proficiency continuum as "a lens through which to explore and expand our moral views," (p.17) referring back to Cross' (1989) notion of implementing movement toward cultural proficiency from the inside-out whereby we challenge assumptions about others and how those assumptions have informed policies and practices. Examining school systems in this way is morally imperative (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

Embedded within the continuum is an assertion that educators have a moral obligation to strive toward cultural proficiency as they assess cultural knowledge, value diversity, manage the dynamics of difference, adapt to diversity, and institutionalize

cultural knowledge (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). However, although morally imperative, movement from the earlier, more destructive, stages of the continuum, to the later more effective stages, requires educators to overcome obstacles associated with confronting long standing cultural norms, recognizing elements of the system that simultaneously privilege dominant populations while oppressing others (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

In this literature review, the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (CampbellJones, CampbellJones, & Lindsey 2010) (Table 5) serves as a framework for describing the attitudes and behaviors of educators as well as a means for reporting the views of other researchers. Research related to deficit thinking, inherent bias, color- blindness, critical race theory, social justice and cultural proficient organizational change are discussed within the corresponding stage on the continuum.

Table 5

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Adapted from The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Description and Action (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Precompetence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
Attitudes and behaviors toward different cultures is disapproving and demeaning.	Language describes minority groups as less important with minimal potential for contributions.	Actions and discussion come from a view that differences in culture are non - existence and seeing all people the same is appropriate.	Realization that lack of understanding of other cultures and limited knowledge creates haphazard decision making and awkward interactions with children and families.	Engage in ongoing education leading toward cultural proficiency while interacting with people in other cultures through a lens of appreciating difference.	Honors differences among cultures and views diversity as a benefit. Engages others in actions to promote equity and social justice for every cultural group.

Cultural destructiveness. Cultural destructiveness is when teachers and school leaders perpetuate a system that makes every effort to eliminate different cultures and instead tries to homogenize all students into one norm (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010). Evans (2007) and Terrell & Lindsey (2009) assert that school culture is created by the belief system of dominant culture of middle class, white families. Essentially culturally destructive people strictly adhere to maintaining the norms of the dominant race failing to realize the need to fully understand how culture is constructed (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Cultural incapacity. Cultural incapacity is when educators tend to stereotype those from different cultures and treat them as inferior (Lindsey & Terrell, 2009). Described as deficit thinking (Nelson & Guerra, 2014) these educators hold negative beliefs and stereotypes about people of color and people living in poverty. Researchers have found that teachers often employ deficit thinking about students who are culturally, linguistically or socio-economically different than themselves (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Milner, 2015; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Suburban teachers, inexperienced with teaching a diverse student body, often fall into this category exhibiting deficit thinking toward students of color and socio-economically disadvantaged students when revealing their frustration toward cultural differences or lack of family resources more typical of middle class white children (Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013).

Evans (2007) drills deeper into the concept by emphasizing the need for teachers and administrators to reflect upon their assumptions about people of color and pervasive stereotypes about minority groups and impoverished people. Educators must begin to question what they are basing their assumptions on and reconsider the method used or

data collected to inform their assumptions (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

Cultural blindness. Cultural blindness is what many educators proudly declare themselves when they say they are blind to cultural difference, professing not to notice cultural differences and that they treat all students and families the same. Such declaration reveals failure to recognize that children may have different needs depending upon their lifestyle and belief systems (Lindsey & Terrell, 2009). Ullucci & Battey (2011) explain that color-blind educators say they do not see their own race or their students' race at all. Proclaiming that they treat all students the same, these educators argue that culture difference is not a factor in their classrooms.

Such dismissiveness indicates failure to appreciate that personal beliefs and circumstance are factors in the way teachers interact with children and the way children learn. Ullucci & Battey (2011) make a strong claim that color- blindness allows educators to linger blissfully in ignorance ignoring their responsibility to understand the complexities of racial hierarchies. It is easier to resist acknowledging the privilege that comes with certain skin color and social class. By doing so, researchers argue this race-neutral approach "shows how the failure to specifically address race-related issues within suburban school districts undergoing demographic change further perpetuates the racial inequities existent in public schools" (Diem, Holme & Welton 2013). To overcome color-blindness, Ullucci & Battey (2011) recommend color consciousness, whereby, educators recognize others' worldviews and understand that their own behaviors, beliefs and customs are informed, at least in part, by their race.

Pollock (2004) probes more deeply in the concept of color- blindness exposing a race-neutral or color-muteness state. This is one where educators avoid talking about race and resist reviewing policies and practices through a racial equality lens (Pollock, 2004). The research of Diem, Holme & Welton (2013) found that although school district leaders were interested in achievement rates, they continued to resist engaging in authentic discussion about racial identity and educators approach to have a dialogue about race. Instead, district leaders avoided expressing appreciation for difference, remained color-mute and failed to change systems, policies and practices. Rather, it remained the expectation that students and families would change to fit into the norms of the majority.

Cultural pre-competence. Cultural pre-competence is when educators realize that their own lack of cultural awareness contributes to awkward and inappropriate experiences with children and families from different backgrounds. CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey (2010) explain, "lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits one's ability to effectively interact with students"(p.23). Culturally pre-competent educators begin to see that personal paradigm influences classroom instruction and relationships with students and families (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009).

Awareness of cultural identity begins with a full exploration of what it means to be white (Parker, 1998; Tate, 1997). The practice of examining the privilege and paradigm associated with one's whiteness may seem foreign to white educators but is absolutely necessary. People of color are highly aware of the implications of being white and being not white (Matias, 2013). Typically found in studies about white teachers in

urban settings, researchers discuss the difficulty for white educators to become culturally responsive without first engaging in discussions of race, racism and white power (Matias, 2013). All races need to develop an understanding of each other's identity, norms and expectations (Howard, 2007) recognizing that race is essential to identity and function in the world (Evans, 2007).

Many researchers suggest the first step to move educators toward culturally responsive teaching is to reflect upon their own cultural belief systems, biases and underlying assumptions (McAllister & Irvine, 2011; Milner, 2015) about non-native English speakers and students who approach learning from cultural experiences different than their own. An "inside-out" reflection process about personal beliefs, traditions and behaviors is needed where reflecting inward allows for an appreciation of difference and thus creates a transformation of personal values and system priorities (Delpit, 1995; CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010) that will better serve all students.

Individual and systemic paradigm informs how educators develop relationships with white and non-white students, plan instruction and respond to situations in and out of the classroom (Milner, 2015; Rothstein, Fisch &Trumbell, 2008). Educators who recognize this then reflect upon the learning opportunities with a critical eye, often realizing this inherent bias interferes with teacher's personal interactions in the classroom. It comes to light that instructional approaches may be unfair or inaccessible to some children given their cultural heritage or income level. To overcome this discord, Gay (2010) states:

> Teachers need to understand different cultural intersections and incompatibilities, minimize the tensions, and bridge the gaps among different cultural systems.

Congruency between how the educational process is ordered and delivered, and

the cultural frames of reference of diverse students, will improve school

achievement for students of color (p. 12).

Furthermore, in Milner's (2015) analysis of how schools approach race and

poverty, he reinforces that an educator's worldview and belief system govern their

approach to teaching and the system policies that minimize or maximize inclusion and

expose policies about students' access to coursework and programs. Until teachers and

leaders ask hard questions about their own biases, it is difficult to move toward a system

of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009).

Cultural competence. Culturally competent educators have an understanding of

cultural differences and that understanding informs all aspects of instruction including

classroom management and organizational systems (Trumbell et. al., 2001). Culturally

competent educators abandon the notion of color-blindness and instead find ways to

include native language and culture into daily teaching (Cooper, He, Levin, 2011).

Educators embark on asset-based-thinking (Cooper, He, Levin, 2011) when they embrace

students' cultural difference and highlight their strengths rather than dwelling on

cognitive, social, emotional or cultural deficits. Asset- based thinking and embracing

difference will build a learning community where children feel comfortable revealing

their full identity (Cooper, He, Levin, 2011).

Furthermore, culturally responsive educators "advocate for their students, and

they work hard to empower students and families to challenge institutional structures that

are not equitable (Cooper, He, Levin, 2011). CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey

(2010, p. 28) define culturally competent educators as those who are dedicated to incorporating the following five essential elements into their practice:

- A commitment to social justice that addresses the educational needs of every current and emerging cultural group in the school and community.

- A commitment to advocacy that is natural, normal, and effective.

- A commitment to mentoring the historically underserved and to give them educational opportunities that allow them to thrive academically and socially.

- A commitment to mentoring those historically well served by current practice to become aware of and responsive to those historically underserved individuals and cultural groups.

- A commitment to leveling the playing field so every cultural group can participate as colleagues, students, and/or members of the community.

Cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency is achieved when educators honor people of different cultures and life experiences and engage others in achieving equity and social justice for all people. Terrell and Lindsey (2009) define cultural proficiency as "a mindset for how we interact with all people, irrespective of their cultural memberships. Cultural proficiency is a worldview that carries explicit values, language, and standards for effective personal interactions and professional practices" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 21). It is a mindset that goes beyond blaming others for lack of achievement or tolerating difference to "transformational commitment to equity" where educators seek out ways to learn instructional strategies that will work for minority students (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 22). Howard (2007) argues that educators must move beyond confusion and blame and work toward building trust, establishing culture,

confronting social justice issues, transform instructional practice and addressing the needs of the entire school culture.

Too often educators think there is a quick fix when dealing with people who are culturally different from them. According to Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell (2009) culturally proficient educators accept responsibility for continually learning about cultural differences and over time become hyper aware and have a constant appreciation for difference. A highly functioning learning environment is one where the views and cultural norms of all students are appreciated (Lindsey et al., 2009). A highly effective culturally proficient system is one where the learning community is "assessing culture, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity and institutionalizing cultural knowledge" (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 60).

Those systems achieving cultural proficiency espouse a full commitment to designing a school where teachers and school leaders see their role as advocating for all cultural groups and seeking out opportunities to build relationships with all families and their communities. These educators realize that this work is never complete and continually challenge each other to reflect upon personal interactions, instructional practices and curricular programming to further promote a socially just democracy.

Culturally Proficient Leadership

Terrell & Lindsey (2009) charge all educational leaders to become culturally proficient leaders by instilling the following guiding principles in all educators.

- Culture is a predominant force in people's and school's lines.

- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.

- People have group identities and individual identities.

- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.

- Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.

- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity for all. (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 24)

Culturally proficient leaders know that they must see learning about culture as a priority for teachers and help educators to understand the presence of the dominant culture in subgroups and pockets of the school. Such leaders are continuous learners about culture, plan and participate in professional development exercises to develop cultural competencies among all staff. Finally, culturally proficient leaders make transparent the notion of continual problem solving and ways to resolve conflicts so that it is viewed as a normal process within an organization (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Barriers to culturally proficient leadership. Leading a culturally proficient system is difficult for educators. One of the biggest barriers is resistance to change (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010). Another powerful barrier for school leaders is addressing educators who struggle to see that their own practices or the traditions and practices in their schools are unfair to students outside the dominant population. Resistant educators are hesitant to take a close look at data including the percent of identified special education students, suspension rates among minority students and assignment of students to gifted programs and accelerated courses. These data frequently reveals the dominant culture as well represented and minority students as underrepresented (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Instead they get defensive holding tight to the entitlement they share often resisting change efforts by persistent leaders (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Resistance to change, exposing systems of oppression, and the

unwavering sense of privilege and entitlement are the reasons schools have been unable

to make major reforms and finally embrace cultural diversity and meet the needs of a

diverse population (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010; Terrell & Lindsey,

2009).

Professional Learning to Meet the Needs of a Changing Population of Learners

Evans (2007) insists that schools will continue to face rapid change in

demographics and that suburban teachers are underprepared to meet their academic and

social needs. It is essential to provide professional development "to teach school

professionals how to maintain a classroom that is sensitive to cultural diversity and to

uphold high, ethically defensible standards in fairness in their work" (Sirin, Rogers-Sirin

& Collins, 2010, p.50).

This study explores the alignment of districts' culturally proficient professional

learning experiences with the seven Learning Forward Standards and the impact these

professional learning experiences have on teacher effectiveness and classroom

instruction. The literature suggests that there is a direct correlation between educators'

continual learning and student achievement specifically if professional learning is

designed in accordance with professional learning standards (Darling-Hammond, 1997;

Harwell, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 2003; Hord, 2009). Hirsh (2009) states, "several

national studies on what distinguishes high- performing, high poverty schools from their

lower-performing counterparts consistently identify effective schoolwide collaborative

professional learning as critical to the school's success (p.3).

The most powerful means to improve student achievement is through highly

qualified teachers. Professional learning builds capacity if there is an underlying belief

that it is the responsibility of all educators to reach all students and that all students are able to demonstrate growth and achievement. Teachers with this mindset embrace learning new skills, deepening their content knowledge and are flexible with a vast toolbox of strategies to explore with all kinds of students (Harwell, 2003). Educators who are hesitant to change, avoid professional learning or are resistant participants in professional learning experiences are essentially pushing off their duty to continually learn about ways to reach all students (Harwell, 2003). Hord (2009) explains that the quality of teaching improves with continuous professional learning. To maintain a highly-qualified teaching workforce, districts need to create meaningful, standards- based, job embedded professional learning and teachers need to view continual learning as essential to meeting the needs of students as they change over the years (Hord, 2009). "When educator practice improves, students have a greater likelihood of achieving results" (Standards for Professional Learning: Quick Reference Guide, 2016).

Professional learning standards. In a report, "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad", researchers reviewed the state of professional development across the country compared to other countries (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Rickardson, & Orphanos, 2009) and found that standards based professional development is implemented in districts across the country yet is highly inconsistent in its quality and effectiveness. According to Hirsh (2009) more than 40 states have adopted standards based professional development requiring professional development for all educators yet it focuses primarily on content knowledge and mentoring systems for new teachers. It also indicates, "overall, the kind of high-intensity, job-embedded collaborative learning

that is most effective is not a common feature of professional development across most states, districts, and schools in the United States" (Hirsh, 2009, p.4). Hirsh (2009) cautions that schools need to do more to ensure that teachers continually bolster their skills and knowledge that allow them to meet the challenges of a changing student population and teach the more complex academic content and problem-solving skills of the 21st century.

Learning forward standards for professional learning (2011). In 2013, "Learning Forward", formally known as National Staff Development Council, revised the professional development standards, and placed a greater emphasis on educators as learners by changing the title from professional development to professional learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion, & Hirsch, 2011). Standards for Professional Learning (2011) calls for districts to provide meaningful, differentiated, high quality learning opportunities and expects educators to come to professional learning experiences open and ready to learn. Although the original categories, context, processes, and content, are evident in the new standards, additional attention is given to the Learning Communities, Leadership and Resources as the "essential conditions for effective professional learning" (Mizell, Hord, Killion, & Hirsch, 2011). Educators' mindset and approach to learning are described in Data, Learning Designs and Implementation while the content thread can be found in Outcomes (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011).

The Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards support the premise that professional learning is worthy only if it increases educator effectiveness and results in greater student achievement. Mizell, Hord, Killion, & Hirsch (2011) explain when Professional Learning Standards are applied, educators feel empowered as partners in

setting learning goals, determining how they will learn and evaluate the outcome of their learning. Maximizing the learning experience requires openness, trust, risk and acting on a sense of urgency from teachers and administrators (Harwell, 2003). Educators come to appreciate the vast knowledge of their colleagues and the power of group think. The Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards explain a precursor to highly productive professional learning when saying:

> Because there are disparate experience levels and use of practice among educators, professional learning can foster collaborative inquiry and learning that enhances individual and collective performance. This cannot happen unless educators listen to one another, respect one another's experiences and perspectives, hold students' best interests at the forefront, trust that their colleagues share a common vision and goals, and are honest about their abilities, practices, challenges, and results. (Standards for Professional Learning: Quick Reference Guide, 2016, p.3)

When engrossed in standards based professional learning, educators see the benefit of taking a leadership role in identifying students' needs, teachers' needs and create methods to facilitate professional learning that produces schoolwide improvement in student achievement. Researchers agree that effective professional learning that has the greatest impact on student achievement incorporates all the professional learning standards (Reeves, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Joyce & Showers, 2003).

Cultural Proficiency Professional Development

In a study focused on suburban schools who have made efforts to prepare teachers for a changing population, Evans (2007) found that the essential issues were related to

individual and collective faculty belief systems, maintaining or recreating school identity in response to a changing demographic and the power and politics that influences decision making regarding curriculum, culture and programming. Evans (2007) explains that as student bodies are looking differently, those districts trying to bring about change must come to terms with the fact that curriculum, mindsets toward students, traditions and overall school culture has been based on an historically white middle class population. Suburban teachers must understand their responsibility to educate people of color and appreciate the impact cultural beliefs and social class has on the way a child learns and interacts in a school system (Ayscue, 2016; Frankenburg & Ayscue, 2013).

Milner (2015) writes, "engaging educators with race can be a game changer for children. It is within educational institutions where educators seriously engage issues of race that I have seen the most pervasive and positive changes and improvement for students of color" (p. 11). Cooper, He, Levin (2011) go on to say that professional development goes beyond growing knowledge about cultural beliefs and behaviors but emphasizes the need for ongoing reflection about classroom practices and daily interactions with diverse students as well as they ways in which educators interact with families.

Professional development must include emphasis on critical reflection (Cooper, Ye & Levin, 2011) with "opportunities for teachers to explore their own racial and cultural identities as well as become familiar with the racial and cultural identities of their students" (Beardsley & Teitel, 2004, p. 97). Critical reflection asks educators to ponder their assumptions, biases and beliefs in a same and carefully facilitated environment. Facilitation strategies include building trust among participants and deepening discussion

through careful scaffolding, feedback and teacher centered activities (Cooper, Le & Levin, 2011). In this way, teachers are developing a culturally competent mindset while practicing culturally responsive instructional practices (Cooper, Ye & Levin, 2011). Practice in this mindset and pedagogy allows for judgement free consideration of students' cultural backgrounds and respect for students' home-community culture as they engage in school each day.

Summary

The population in the United States is growing increasingly diverse with higher numbers of families in poverty and a rise in minority populations (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2016). As schools are also becoming more diverse, they have to find ways to meet the needs of impoverished children, English Language Learners (ELLs) and children with a wide range of family experiences (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). In the past, educators in suburban schools were accustomed to working primarily with white, middle class children and families (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Suburban school leaders find themselves facing the challenges more often associated with urban schools (Tyler, 2016; Wepner, 2012).

This literature review describes how addressing the needs of a racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse student population asks educators to reflect upon their personal biases and focus on embracing the wealth of experiences brought by a diverse community rather than dwell on deficits (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Researchers also agree that districts that successfully shift instructional practice and their school culture toward a more inclusive model are districts where teachers work collaboratively with school leaders to plan and lead ongoing high quality professional development (Mizell,

Hord, Killion, & Hirsch, 2011). Terrell and Lindsey (2009) challenge leaders to create a culturally proficient system where children and adults alike appreciate and honor differences among cultures and view diversity as an asset. Educators who thrive to maintain a culturally proficient system continually engage in actions to promote equity and social justice for every cultural group.

When reviewing the literature, the bulk of research about children in poverty, minority populations and the effectiveness of cultural proficiency professional development focuses on urban districts. Although much can be learned from this perspective, research detailing the experiences and perspectives of suburban teachers and school leaders is needed. This qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted with semi structured interview questions designed to address research questions focused on the types of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences, the types of learning environments created for all learners and any future plans to develop teachers' and principals' understanding of cultural proficiency. The study seeks out the perspectives of teachers, principals and district leaders and encourages them to provide rich detail about their views on the changing population in their suburban districts and the types of professional development provided to assist teachers and school leaders as they adjust practice and policies to better serve all students. Chapter Three contains a full description of the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The changing demographics among children and families in the United States and in New York State are a reason for concern among educators. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 2013 New York was one of sixteen states and the District of Columbia that had a poverty rate of higher than the national average for children 5-17 years old (Kena, et al., 2015). Children in poverty often struggle with cognitive development and feel like outsiders in schools that are functioning under the norms of the middle class (Jensen, 2009). Beyond the increase of families in poverty, NCES also reports that diversity nationwide has increased significantly (Kena, et al., 2015).

NCES (Kena, et al., 2015) research predicts that by 2024, the percentages of Hispanic students will increase to 29%, Asian/Pacific Islander students will increase to 6% and students of two or more races will increase to 4% and, white students in American schools will decrease to 46%. Kneebone and Berube (2013) report that suburban schools are not immune to changing diversity trends. Suburban teachers often exhibit deficit thinking toward students of color and socio-economically disadvantaged students, revealing their frustration toward cultural differences or lack of family resources more typical of middle class white children (Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of professional learning in developing cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional practices that are responsive to the needs of racially, ethnically

and socio-economically diverse student groups. Through the lens of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, (2009) and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011) the researcher used a phenomenological approach to research and conducted interviews as the primary means of data collection. A district administrator/coordinator of professional development, the principal, eleven teachers (elementary and/or middle school and/or high school) in three suburban districts in upstate New York were interviewed.

This chapter explains the purpose of the study, the research questions and provides a detailed explanation of the qualitative research design including the population and sample, along with the data collection, coding and data analysis process.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?

2. Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning?

3. What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students?

4. In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a cultural proficient system?

Research Design

The researcher selected qualitative research methods to learn from the participants, in narrative form, their level of understanding about the nature of cultural proficiency training and its impact on their mindset toward impoverished and racially diverse children. Qualitative research methods allowed for themes to emerge organically throughout the data collection process (Creswell, 2014). In this phenomenological study the researcher examined "the essence and basic structure of experience" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.26) in each of three districts, through in- depth simultaneous examination of similarities and differences in their approach to developing cultural proficiency in their teachers and principals. This phenomenological approach allows the researcher to gain a greater depth of understanding of the intensity that accompanies working with children in poverty and the often-emotional responses that occur during self- reflection about one's implicit bias and other efforts educators undergo when developing cultural competence in suburban districts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Careful analysis of interview narrative allowed theories regarding the importance of cultural proficiency in suburban schools to evolve. To expand upon the limited research that has been done regarding cultural competence in suburban schools, this researcher took a more exploratory, constructivist approach to data collection and analysis for the purpose of gleaning subjective information and the ability to probe in more detail (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012).

Population

Much like population figures nationally suggest, the Capital Region in Upstate New York is also experiencing a changing demographic in student population. The

Capital Region in Upstate New York is located in the eastern part of mid- New York State surrounding the capital city of Albany. This region spans eight counties including rural, suburban and urban settings. It is recognized for its strong economy and long-standing history as a hub for industry particularly with innovative technology, several medical facilities and of colleges and research universities (Capital Region, 2017).

The Capital Region Statistical Report (2015) describes that the region continues to have a predominantly white population, declining only .4% from 2010 to 2014. However, the percentage of nonwhite and Hispanic populations has grown significantly; the Asian population increased 21.6% and the Hispanic population grew 19% from 2010 to 2014. Furthermore, the rate of those in poverty increased by 24% in the region between 2000 and 2013 (Capital Region Statistical Report, 2015).

Twelve suburban school districts in the Capital Region formed a collaborative partnership known as the Suburban Scholastic Council. They established goals that "promote educational inter- school activities, foster friendly relations among the student bodies, faculties, communities, and administrators of the member school districts; provide opportunities to exchange ideas; provide uniform procedures for inter- school activities." (The Constitution of the Suburban Scholastic Council, 2017). These suburban schools range in size; three smaller districts house approximately 3000 students, eight districts house between 3500 to 6500 students and the largest suburban district in this region has over 9500 students. Eight out of twelve of these school had an increase in minority students of over ten percent from the 2005/06 to the 2015/16 school years (NYSED, 2017). Similarly, all the districts in this council had an increase of

economically disadvantaged students. Increases ranged from an increase of 5% to more than 25% (NYSED, 2017).

The demographic make-up of suburban communities is changing and that in many instances, educators have been caught off guard failing to adjust to the growing numbers of suburban children in poverty (McKay-Wilson, 2012). McKay-Wilson (2012) writes that suburban teachers are struggling to accept that suburbs now face the difficulties more often found in urban schools in light of the increased numbers of impoverished students. Very often suburban educators are not familiar with the needs and learning styles of poor children. Milner (2015) explains that if educators have not "lived in poverty, experienced racism or other forms of discrimination" (p. 31) or participated in reform movements aimed to help marginalized populations, it is very difficult for them to understand how to bring about systemic change.

Sample

The Capital Region of New York was chosen for student demographic recent changes with regard to racial diversity and students in poverty. To understand the impact of changing demographics on districts more fully in the capital region and investigate the types of professional development offered to districts in the last five years, the researcher consulted with three professionals who have directly provided professional development to teachers and school leaders about developing cultural competency, creating culturally responsive environments and understanding poverty.

The first consultation was with a faculty member at the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) whose expertise is leading schools to build capacity in improving school climate and culture and to further understand the needs of students in

poverty through poverty simulation professional development. This CASDA faculty member described the plea from many schools for more resources about children in poverty given an increase in need in local schools (Gardner, personal communication, August, 20, 2016).

The second consultation was with the Education Director of the Albany Region chapter of the Anti -Defamation League (ADL) who provides training for educators and youth and provides resources to schools within New York State. She listed local schools who have partnered with the ADL in the No Place for Hate initiative and those seeking training for staff in cultural proficiency (Martinez, personal communication, September, 25, 2016).

The third consultation was with a staff developer from Capital Region BOCES specializing in assisting students in poverty, students from diverse backgrounds and students overcoming trauma. She explained her work with capital region schools to increase awareness of increasing mental health issues among children suffering from trauma or in situations of prolonged poverty (Kaplan, personal communication, September, 30, 2016). All of these professionals assisted the researcher with identifying suburban districts in the region that have engaged in professional development to address their changing demographic.

After selecting districts who met the criteria of having participated in training regarding developing cultural proficiency, creating culturally responsive environments and understanding poverty within the last five years, the researcher conducted additional inquiries to find three districts willing to participate in this study voluntarily. Teachers, principals, district office administrators in three suburban New York State Capital Region

districts provided an adequate number of sites and participants to achieve a wide range of perspectives and redundancy in their responses to answer the research questions. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To ensure exploration of multiple perspectives about the district's disposition toward diverse and impoverished suburban children, the researcher identified one district office administrator serving as coordinator of professional development, who then identified one principal, and four teachers from elementary, middle and/or high school level. Interviewing a district office administrator in this study allowed for discovery of the degree of emphasis placed on and resources allotted for systemic learning about cultural proficiency and issues of poverty. Interviewing principals and teachers in these districts gave insight into the impact cultural proficiency professional learning experiences influenced the disposition of teachers and school leaders. Principal leadership is essential to developing a school climate that embraces cultural differences (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

Identifying such participants gave the researcher opportunity to explore the change of disposition, instructional practices and system leadership regarding developing culturally proficient practices over time. This type of nonprobability, purposeful, snowball sampling method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was implemented given that it "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 96). After approval from the superintendent (see Appendix A & B), the researcher contacted the district office administrator to select principals meeting the criteria and make recommendations for teachers meeting the criteria. Interview

participants were given initial notification by either the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction or the building principal. The researcher contacted interview participants directly and set up individual interviews.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through one to one, semi-structured interviews allowing participants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences and giving the researcher opportunity to ask follow-up questions depending upon participant responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher developed three sets of interview questions, one set for the district level coordinator of professional development, one set for principals and one set for teachers (see Appendices C, D & E). All participants were asked about their experiences with cultural proficiency professional development and to describe a school that embraces children of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and economically disadvantaged children. All participants were asked to discuss the role of the principal and any changes in teachers' instructional practices, curriculum or district policies resulting from cultural proficiency professional development. All three sets of interview questions also asked about any barriers to achieving a culturally proficient system. Interview questions were open ended, exploratory and elicited descriptive details (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to address the research questions and illuminate a better understanding of the role of professional development and school leadership on developing cultural proficiency.

To construct the highly purposeful interview questions and ensure that they elicited responses relevant to the study's research questions, all three sets of interview questions were pilot tested with teachers, principals, academic directors and the Assistant

Superintendent of Instruction from a suburban district that has only provided initial

professional development in developing cultural competency to its administrative staff;

thus not meeting the criteria of those selected for the study. The researcher gained insight

into how specific wording of some questions drew different responses from different

participants and revised some questions to gain greater validity.

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, the Sage College's Institutional Review Board (IRB)

reviewed and approved the purpose, methodology and interview process assuring that all

research was conducted in an ethical and professional manner (see Appendix J).

Following IRB approval, the researcher contacted the assistant superintendents from each

district to discuss the types of professional development offered within the last five years

to confirm that the district met the criteria for this study. After determining that each of

the three districts were suitable for the study, the researcher acquired the necessary

approval and signed consent form for conducting research in each district from the

superintendent.

The primary process for retrieving data was through one-on-one, semi-structured

interviews either in person or by telephone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Upon approval

from the superintendent the researcher set up face to face interviews via email with the

district coordinator of professional development. After completing the initial interview

with the coordinators of professional development, the researcher asked them, per

Creswell's (2014) suggestion for purposeful snowball sampling, to recommend principal

and teacher participants in their respective districts. In one district, the coordinator of

professional development identified all the participants. In two districts, the coordinator

of professional development and the principals both identified teacher participants and the researcher set up individual interviews with each participant.

   To achieve consistent data collection, the researcher used a researcher- designed interview protocol containing an explanation of confidentiality assurances, consent procedures and a description of the interview process and the interview questions (Creswell, 2012). At the beginning of every interview the researcher provided the participant with a written copy of the interview protocol, the interview questions and a written consent form (see appendices C, D, E & F), reviewed these documents and asked the participant to sign the consent form. In the case of the telephone interview the signed consent form was received by the researcher prior to conducting the interview. The researcher then turned on the audio recording device and proceeded by asking each participant the set of interview questions designed for them asking follow-up questions for clarification or additional description. The researcher took notes during every interview.

At the conclusion of the interview the researcher turned off the audio recorder and reminded participants that the audio tape would be transcribed, they would have opportunity to review and revise the interview transcript and that all data would be kept confidential with the use of pseudonyms for participants and districts (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016).

   The researcher interviewed three district administrators, one from each district, and three principals, one from each district. Interview participants also included four teachers from Cora Creek CSD, four teachers from Kelly Rock CSD and three teachers from Mount David CSD. The researcher conducted a total of seventeen semi- structured

interviews between January 2016 and March 2016. Sixteen interviews were conducted in person in the participant's classroom or office, before, during or after school at the convenience of the participant. One interview was conducted over the phone. All interviews were audio recorded and generally lasted between 35-75 minutes. All materials, notes and interview transcriptions were held secure in a locked file box and on a home password protected computer.

Data Analysis

Data analysis first requires preparing the data and organizing it into an efficient system for analysis (Creswell, 2012). To assist in this process, the researcher hired and trained a confidential secretary to serve as transcriptionist. As required by the IRB and to assure confidentiality, the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement prior to having access to any data whereby she agreed to maintain the highest level of confidentiality (see Appendix G). Further, all materials were kept in a locked file box and all electronic files were kept on a password protected home computer. After each interview, the researcher sent the digital version to the transcriptionist electronically through a password protected file system. The transcriptionist transcribed the digital audio files into word documents and returned the word documents to the researcher through a password protected file system. The researcher read all transcribed files and sent them through email to each participant to review and make corrections and additions. One district coordinator for professional development and three teachers made minor corrections to the transcripts. This member-checking process served to check for accuracy and assure that the transcribed version was an accurate representation of the verbal interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

When member- checking was complete the researcher uploaded all interview documents into QSR NVivo11 (QSR International, 2015) software for coding the data. Using inductive, comparative method an open coding process was employed initially and the researcher coded interview narrative to ease analysis and use of evidence when writing when reporting the data for each research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). School culture and climate, lack of resources, cultural influence, principal leadership, family, poverty and ongoing professional development and committees were among the many codes used by the researcher to organize the data. The researcher continually considered the initial theoretical frames (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009) and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011), and noticed repetitions and common themes in the narrative provided by participants within and across the three suburban districts studied. Recognizing cultural differences of individual students as an asset and teacher participation on district professional development committees are examples that emerged as common themes. The researcher's interpretation of the data is included in this study along with recommendations for future work based on these findings. All data and related materials were destroyed at the end of this study by shredding paper copies and deleting electronic files.

Researcher Bias

The researcher has worked as a teacher, professional developer and building administrator in a suburban school district in the capital region of New York state for over sixteen years and as a teacher in rural school districts for twelve years. The researcher's experience in these capacities influenced the researcher's view of teachers'

and leaders' dispositions toward culturally diverse students and students in poverty. To reduce bias, the researcher encouraged member-checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), employed a constructivist approach (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012) to analysis and sought out assistance from other researchers during interview piloting process and data coding process. The researcher used a scripted interview protocol during the interview process to maximize consistency and reduce interjection of bias.

Validity

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) address the notion that qualitative research is based on "what is being investigated are people's construction of reality-how they understand the world" (p.243). In this study, each participant offered interpretations of the school culture, the practices of other educators and the types of cultural proficiency professional development offered. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that the best approach to achieving internal validity in qualitative research is through triangulation. To achieve internal validity, the researcher in this study reviewed the data to compare descriptions given by multiple participants in the same district about school or district activities and thus triangulating the data. Internal validity was also ensured through member- checks when interviewees were given the opportunity read their interview transcripts and make revisions or additions. As recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher included thick and rich description of the data throughout data reporting and analysis. Rich description revealed the significance of the varying perspectives offered by each interviewee (Alemu, 2016).

Reliability

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that reliability, "is the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (p.25). The researcher made efforts to ensure reliability by using the same set of interview questions for like participants during data collection and by following an interview protocol. These instruments were used only after they had been pilot tested with experts in a district not participating in the study. When reviewing the data, the researcher prepared for the coding process by extracting key words from the literature review and from the theoretical frameworks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009) and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011). These key words were used as codes during the data analysis process to enhance reliability.

Summary

Research shows that the population in Upstate New York and across the United States is growing more diverse from both socioeconomic and multicultural perspectives (Capital Region Statistical Report, 2015; Kena, 2015), and the increasing number of children struggling in poverty is well documented (Kneebone, & Berube, 2013). This chapter describes the research design, methodology, data collection and analysis practices used in this qualitative study to explore the efforts made in three suburban school districts in the Capital Region of New York State to increase suburban teachers' understanding of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009) and suburban districts' approach to developing cultural proficient systems that will better serve their new population of

students and families. In the following chapter, the researcher describes the findings that

surfaced after careful analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of professional learning in developing cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional practices that are responsive to the needs of racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse student groups. Through the lens of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009) and Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011), the researcher used a phenomenological approach to research and conducted interviews as the primary means of data collection. Three district administrators, one from each district, and three principals, one from each district were interviewed. Interview participants also included four teachers from Cora Creek CSD, four teachers from Kelly Rock CSD and three teachers from Mount David CSD.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?

2. Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning?

3. What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students?

4. In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a cultural proficient system?

Open ended interviews questions were asked of seventeen participants to gain a thorough understanding of the type of professional development available to participants and how it shaped their thinking and shifted their practice about teaching children from diverse backgrounds. The researcher also wanted to get a sense of whether participants felt their school environment would be viewed as welcoming by children and families of all life experiences.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section offers an overview of the demographics of each district and a chart detailing each participant's position and years in the position. The next section provides rich detail from the interview transcripts in response to each of the four research questions. The last section summarizes the findings noted in this chapter.

Participants

Cora Creek Central School District, Kelly Rock Central School District and Mount David Central School District(pseudonyms) were selected to be part of this study. Data was collected from teachers, principals, and coordinators of professional development through one to one interviews. All three districts are members of the Capital Region Suburban Council in New York State and, although not a requirement for this study, are considered high performing districts with 4- year graduation rates of over 90% and stable learning environments with low suspension rates of less than 5% and with overall teacher turnover rates of less than 10% (NYSED, 2017). The researcher reviewed

demographic information from the last ten years to determine the degree of change for the following subgroups: Economically Disadvantaged, Alaska and Native American, Black or African American, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, White, Multiracial, and Limited English Proficient.

From 2006 to 2016, all three districts saw an increase of at least 7% of the total population of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch: Cora Creek CSD had an increase of 7%; Mount David CSD had an increase of 12% and in Kelly Rock CSD, the percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch went from 7% to 21% in ten years (New York State Education Department, 2017).

As noted in Table 6, ten years ago, all three school districts had a small population of minority students with the white population making up approximately 90% in Cora Creek Central School District, 85% in Kelly Rock Central School District, and 90% in Mount David Central School District. Currently, all three of these districts have seen an increase in racial diversity over the past ten years. In Cora Creek CSD, the white student population decreased by at least ten percent. In Kelly Rock CSD and Mount David CSD, the white student population decreased by approximately 10% (New York State Education Department, 2017). The largest change in racial make-up of these school districts has been with the Asian/ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander student population increasing by approximately 5% in all three districts in this study. Students identifying as multi- racial has also increased by at least 3% in all of these districts. (New York State Education Department, 2017). Changes in Hispanic and Black/African American student populations were observed as well.

Table 6

Demographic Make Up of Participating School Districts years (New York State Education Department, 2017).

	Cora Creek CSD		Kelly Rock CSD		Mount David CSD	
	2006/07	2015/16	2006/07	2015/16	2006/07	2015/16
Free/ Reduced Lunch	10%	15%	10%	20%	5%	20%
English Language Learners	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Alaskan/Native American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Black/African American	<5%	<5%	5%	5%	<5%	<5%
Hispanic/Latino	<5%	5%	<5%	5%	<5%	<5%
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	<5%	10%	10%	15%	5%	10%
White	90%	80%	85%	70%	90%	80%
Multi-Racial	<5%	5%	0%	<5%	0%	<5%

*To preserve confidentiality, percentages have been rounded to the nearest 5%. Those percentages below 5% are indicated as <5%.

These three districts met the criteria for this study of having a change in population and having provided professional development related to meeting the needs of diverse learners. After gaining approval from the superintendent to begin the interview protocol, the researcher interviewed seventeen participants between January 26, 2017 and March 15, 2017. The researcher interviewed the Assistant Superintendents for Curriculum and Instruction, not only for their views and perspectives but also to identify additional principal and teacher participants. Table 7 details the participants' title, gender and years of experience in each district.

Table 7

Participants' Position in the District and Years in the Position

Position Title	Gender	YPD*
Cora Creek Central School District		
District Coordinator for Professional Development	F	5-8
High School Principal	M	9-12
Elementary Literacy Coach	F	5-8
High School Math Teacher	M	9-12
High School Special Education	F	9-12
Middle and High School ENL teacher	F	13-16
Kelly Rock Central School District		
District Coordinator for Professional Development	F	5-8
Principal	F	9-12
1st Grade Teacher	F	13-16
High School Math Teacher	F	5-8
High School Special Ed. Teacher	F	13-16
Elementary Special Ed. Teacher	F	1-4
Mount David Central School District		
District Coordinator for Professional Development	M	21-24
Principal	M	5-8
1st Grade Teacher	F	17-20
Elementary Math Specialist	M	21-24
High School Chemistry	F	9-12

*YPD – Range of years in the position in the district- listed by range to ensure confidentiality.

Findings:

A full description of the findings associated with each research question are provided in this section. Evidence for these findings includes narrative from interview participant transcripts, and detailed information specific to each school district. Findings for Research Question 1 give a full picture of the kinds of professional learning experiences that were offered by each district. Findings for Research Question 2 are discussed in accordance with the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011). Findings for Research Question 3 are

organized by district and explain the environments created in schools as they work toward becoming more culturally responsive district. Findings for Research Question 4 describe each district's place along the *Cultural Proficiency Continuum* (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010) and their priorities as they plan future professional learning experiences with the intent of further developing culturally proficient systems.

Research Question 1: **What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?** Cultural proficiency professional development in these three suburban districts included offering training in implicit bias, strategies to assist ELLs, understanding diversity through an asset – based mindset and understanding the behavioral characteristics and needs of children in poverty.

The focus of professional development in Mount David CSD in recent years was on developing a more inclusive system for special education and English Language Learners (ELL). Cora Creek CSD and Kelly Rock CSD provided trainings that called teachers and school leaders to reflect upon the impact personal bias has on approaches to instruction. Teachers noted that participating in poverty simulations, inherent bias sessions and differentiation strategies for ELLs were most useful. Professional development occurred through required trainings held in schools during faculty meetings or superintendent's conference days and voluntary sessions offered after school or through attendance at conferences. All three districts offered a wide range of professional development offerings to create culturally proficient learning environments. Table 8 lists the types of professional development offered by these suburban districts and the number of participants who attended each.

Table 8

Types of professional development offerings and number of interview participants who attended.

PD Offering	Participants who attended*
Lectures and workshops given by external experts	13
Membership on district and/or building PD committees	8
Professional readings with follow up discussion sessions	9
Professional development through interactive simulation	6
PD on Understanding Children in Poverty	14
PD on Understanding Diversity and Implicit Bias	11
PD on Creating an Inclusive Environment	7

*out of the total # (17) of participants.

Detailed accounts of professional learning experiences and the overarching focus of each district's professional development plan are provided in the following section and are organized by school district.

Cora Creek Central School District. In Cora Creek CSD, professional development was focused on developing a culturally competent mindset among administrators and teachers. Particularly throughout the last three years, the district concentrated its professional learning among administrators and teachers on understanding cultural competency and inherent bias through trainings among the leadership team and then subsequent professional development in the buildings. The coordinator of professional development in Cora Creek CSD explained the approach to professional development was fueled by a number of scholarly resources. For example, a team of six administrators attended a cultural proficiency conference and are using several of those resources to inform their work in the district through book studies and

turnkey professional development sessions. The Cora Creek CSD high school principal elaborated on the professional development provided to administrators explaining that these leaders contributed resources for discussion and met with the superintendent's leadership academy throughout the year and that ways to continue cultural competency training is a standing item on the agenda.

The Cora Creek district coordinator of professional development also explained that the district brought in speakers and consultants to work with administrators and teachers on understanding bias. She described that finding an entry point to these difficult conversations was key in achieving a successful shift in mindset and practice. During one training, "We did the Iceberg Model and a little bit more about getting to know themselves and how other people may label them because that is often an entry point into the conversation."

The high school principal participant in this district also described the importance of teacher buy- in when speaking about one keynote speaker who was well received by the faculty, one who made great progress in shifting the mindset of teachers:

> We have a social worker who works for New York State…coming to speak to the faculty on superintendent's conference day. It's an hour and half cultural competence training. He's already spoken to the faculty at a meeting in October to talk (about the need to realize that) we are changing and we need to change and we need to be understanding.

In Cora Creek, three out of four teachers agreed that professional learning on developing cultural competency was offered. While one math teacher agreed it was offered to some teachers, he saw the need for more of it. The Elementary Literacy Coach

described a wide range of offerings available to teachers including opportunity to attend a poverty simulation and sign up for voluntary workshops. She led a Walk and Talk where teachers discussed the issues presented in Jensen's (2009) poverty books while taking walks together;

> We met at a location, we had an activity and then we walked and talked about the book and/or issues in pairs or trios. We started here and walked through the woods over to the [town] Library and back.   Then we ended with a closing activity. One teacher I remember who had been teaching probably 30 years or so said I wish that I had had this much earlier. I see this child in an entirely different light. I think it was a good experience for all.

A high school math teacher described professional development that he pursued personally to better meet the needs of struggling learners, many of whom were children in poverty and of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. He worked with a consultant who visited once a month and discussed strategies that worked with this population and facilitated discussions among teachers working with these struggling students. This math teacher found this to be very powerful yet pointed out that this experience was only available to a few teachers. He would like to see this kind of professional development offered at faculty meetings more often.

A high school special education teacher at Cora Creek CSD described professional development provided at a faculty meeting where a local agency talked about the numbers of homeless children in the district and what that means in regard to how they perform in school.

Our Culturally Responsive Committee definitely has that(poverty) issue in their sights and the person who came to speak from (local agency) talked about the number of homeless students we have here and it blew peoples' minds. You just don't really think about it and I think it explains a lot when you have a kid who is frequently absent and really disorganized and things like that because they're not necessarily going to the same place every night or sleeping on couches.

Professional development provided in Cora Creek CSD was also focused on developing an understanding of the needs of low SES children and families and developing an awareness of inherent bias and cultural responsiveness. Professional development was offered continuously in different formats and venues (see Appendix I for details) to teachers and administrators.

Kelly Rock Central School District. In Kelly Rock CSD, professional development during these last three years was focused primarily on understanding children and families in poverty with some attention given to cultural diversity. The district coordinator for professional development in this district explained that she planned most professional development with administrators to include understanding poverty through exposure to articles, books and video clips and extended that to teachers through large group experiences with poverty simulations, small group book studies and discussion groups about readings and video clips. She explained:

We've done a lot of the Ruby Payne books to build a baseline knowledge for everybody initially. We've also done a lot of Jensen excerpts and articles. I tend to push those out to principals who then use those for their faculty meetings.

Professional Development in Kelly Rock CSD was not limited to issues of

poverty. The district professional development coordinator explained their work on developing cultural proficiency:

> We looked at that (cultural responsiveness) as a corollary and then in March of 2016 we brought in a speaker to do a training for all of our teachers on culturally responsive classroom.

> When speaking with teachers, it was clear that they were knowledgeable about the

kinds of professional development offered. The Kelly Rock CSD first-grade teacher agreed when she explained:

> In our faculty meetings, we've gone over different articles (provided by the principal) and discussed it (issues of poverty) on occasion… And then our school did a poverty simulation so we went through that last year. We all participated. Again, eye opening.

The Kelly Rock CSD elementary special education teacher also explained another type of professional development offered about issues of poverty:

> We also had one of our professional development days; it was different sort of topics that come up around poverty and we just were broken up randomly into groups and we talked about them and problem solved. We came back together and this was referenced again during staff meetings for the rest of the year.

> A high school special education teacher explained ongoing voluntary professional

development opportunities that teachers could sign up to attend periodically throughout the year. One offering this year was on examining the range of diversity offered in children's literature by looking at different books and working in small groups. Despite all of these professional development offerings, three teachers in Kelly Rock CSD

explained that professional development to help teachers better serve English Language

Learners was limited to only those in co teaching scenarios and that it would be

beneficial for more teachers to have this training. The high school math teacher said:

> Our building is split up into halls and there's a specific hall where all of the
>
> English Language Learners are and so since I don't necessarily teach in that hall, I
>
> don't get any training. But the teachers that are within that specific population,
>
> they've had professional development. They work directly with the ENL teacher
>
> and they've have had a lot. I haven't. I definitely have students speak different
>
> languages or have spoken different languages but they tested out. They are
>
> proficient enough so that they don't have any extra support classes.

The primary focus of professional learning in Kelly Rock CSD was on understanding the

needs of children and families in poverty and some professional development was

provided about cultural diversity and serving ENL students.

> ***Mount David Central School District***. Mount David CSD has been focusing on

making systemic changes to create a full inclusion model and providing professional

development to support those efforts. The coordinator for district professional

development, talked about the district's approach to designing instruction to meet the

needs of all children,

> We've been really aggressively pushing this idea of being inclusive in our district
>
> for all of our students. I wouldn't pinpoint it to just students with disabilities or
>
> ENL but I think it is about the instructional strategies that are going to provide an
>
> engaging environment for all students, provide access to curriculum for all

students and a lot of the work that we've been doing this year has been really

focused around universal design of lessons for all of our students.

A primary focus for the Mount David CSD has been on developing an inclusive

co teaching model for special education students with general educators and also co -

teaching partnerships for ELLs throughout their district. Professional development was

implemented to support differentiation practices in this inclusive model. In this context,

the district coordinator of professional development views these efforts as promoting a

mindset of meeting the needs of all children, including those from poverty and those from

all races and ethnicities. The high school chemistry teacher spoke to the professional

development provided to all teachers about the inclusion model, but did not see this

professional development giving teachers tools to address the needs of economically

disadvantaged children or those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

So, thinking in terms of recent trainings there's nothing I would specifically say

was directed to give us PD about students of poverty or about racially ethnically

diverse students. Instead we've had a lot of trainings recently under the umbrella

of inclusion…. All of these trainings have started off as whole faculty so even

though I don't have any co-taught courses this year I've been asked to attend the

trainings to learn about things like differentiation.

Mount David CSD's district coordinator of professional development described

trainings offered to teachers to better understand the needs of low income families and

specifically mentioned participation in poverty simulations and sessions focused on

communicating with families.

We have also done a number of things around the socioeconomic piece with

students. We've done some poverty simulations, really trying to bring our

administrators up to speed with that and some things they have to be aware of

with communications with parents and doing so in a sensitive manner.

The Mount David CSD elementary teacher pointed out that more professional

development is needed in the area of cultural diversity and students in poverty.

We had a meeting provided by district administration where we talked about our

students who had poverty concerns but that is where we learned we couldn't be

aware of who they were. We did have some (professional development). I don't

think I am well versed in those areas.

However, although the primary focus of professional development was on

strategies for inclusion classrooms, the high school chemistry teacher pointed out that on

some occasions, teachers were given opportunity to attend training on diversity and

global education. Because of her experience teaching in Morocco, she was asked to teach

a session for teachers.

At the time of these interviews Mount David CSD was about to host anti-bullying

professional development for support staff and small teacher groups. They brought in a

private consultant who had partnered with them previously on a research study about

bullying in their district.

She will be doing some sensitivity/cultural awareness/DASA training with all of

our bus drivers, our aides and monitors, our teaching assistants, our clerical staff,

our lunch staff and some teacher groups. We have our crisis team members will

be with her. So, just some small pocketed team based groups.

While professional development in Mount David CSD was centered around developing a more inclusive approach for special education students and ELLS, like Cora Creek CSD and Kelly Rock CSD, teachers and administrators had received training to overcome inherent bias, become more responsive to the needs of all students and to learn about the characteristics of low SES students.

Research Questions 2. Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning? When analyzing the type and quality of professional development provided by these three districts, the researcher considered the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011) that states that effective professional learning occurs:

- within *learning communities* where all educators partner for continuous improvement.

- when *leaders* are invested in ongoing training and developing capacity among all educators for continued growth.

- when leaders seek out *resources* for teachers and prioritize learning experiences.

- when various types of *data* sources are used to evaluate effectiveness of training and professional collaboration.

- when *implementation* learning experiences are delivered in accordance with change theory to bring about lasting change in practice.

- when it is aligned with *curriculum standards* and the desired *student outcomes*.

Analysis of the data indicates that the professional development practices of the three suburban districts in this study demonstrated the characteristics of learning communities, leadership, resources and adult learning practices described in the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011). The evidence is presented in Table 9 and shows the types of professional development offered (as described by the participants in this study) categorized according to the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011). Detailed narrative from interview transcripts provides more in-depth evidence of the quality of professional development and this information is organized according to each tenet of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011).

Table 9

Professional Development Offerings: Aligned with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, 2011).

Attributes of Effective Professional Learning	Cora Creek CSD	Kelly Rock CSD	Mount David CSD
Leaders invested in ongoing training and developing capacity among all educators for continued growth.			
• Superintendents engaged in leading and supporting professional development.	DC, P, T(3)	P, T(3)	P, T(2)
• Professional Development offered to administrators.	DC, P	DC, P	DC, P
• Principals engaged in leading professional development and modeling actions toward developing cultural proficiency.	DC, P, T(3)	DC, P, T(3)	DC, P, T(2)
Educators partner to prioritize professional learning experiences for continuous improvement.			
• District/Building PD committees.	DC, P, T(3)	DC, P, T(3)	T(1)
• Faculty is surveyed to determine PD needs.	P	T(1)	P, T(2)
• Internal experts (ie. teachers, psychologists, counselors etc.) are consulted when planning PD and/or lead PD.	P, T(4)	DC, T (1)	DC, P, T(3)
Leaders seek out resources for teachers.			
• Provide external expertise through key note speakers and conference attendance.	DC, P, T(3)	DC, P, T(3)	DC, P, T(2)
• Make use of internal expertise as workshop facilitators, informal mentors, shared planning time.	T(4)	P, T(2)	DC, T(2)
• Professional readings, research, online resources are distributed.	DC, P, T(3)	DC, P, T(2)	DC, P, T(2)
Learning experiences are delivered in accordance with change theory and theory on adult learning to bring about lasting change in practice.			
• PD is ongoing in various formats (ie. workshops, faculty meetings etc.) and through various lenses.	DC, P, T(4)	DC, P, T(4)	DC, P, T(2)
• PD is offered through interactive experiences.	T(3)	DC, P, T(4)	
• Faculty are involved in planning and implementing PD to create groundswell for change.	P, T(4)	DC, T (1)	DC, P, T(3)
Professional learning is aligned with curriculum standards and student outcomes.			
• Aligned with district goals.	DC, P, T(1)	DC, P, T(1)	DC, P, T(1)
• Review of suspension results, DASA reports, enrollment in honors courses.	DC	DC	DC, P
Various types of data sources are used to evaluate effectiveness of training and professional collaboration.			
• Anecdotal feedback indicating change in instructional practice and learning environment.	P, T(2)	DC, P, T(2)	DC, P, T(1)
• Systematic feedback solicited from PD participants on its effectiveness.	NE	NE	NE
• Systematic feedback solicited from teachers and principals about observed change in instructional practice resulting from PD.	NE	NE	NE

DC – District Coordinator of Professional Development
P - Principal
() - Number of teacher reporting evidence per characteristic.
NE- participants were not asked directly and did not mention forms of evaluation.

Learning communities and leadership. All three districts in this study

demonstrated their commitment to partnering with teachers when planning professional

learning opportunities. Educators in this study discussed opportunities where they,

together with administrators and teachers, prioritized professional learning experiences

for continuous improvement. All districts organized district level professional learning

committees dedicated to developing a better understanding of children in poverty,

children from diverse backgrounds and learning more to meet the needs of all learners.

Teachers were a vital voice on these district committees. Input and partnership in the

planning process is clearly valued in all three of these districts.

All three districts organized district committees to plan professional development

opportunities. When speaking with the district level coordinators who organized these

committees and teachers serving on the committees, there was an overwhelming sense

that these were productive learning experiences and the contributions of these groups

were important to improving practice throughout the district. For example, a teacher

from Cora Creek CSD described the various viewpoints that came together on the district

Diversity Team and the impact it had on her. A Cora Creek CSD first grade teacher said:

> I learn a lot by being in that group. We meet once a month, and it's a group of
>
> people coming from very different backgrounds, expressing different viewpoints.
>
> Some of us are teachers; some of us are administrators; our superintendent is
>
> always there. There are people from the community… parents, high school
>
> students so, yeah, I learn a lot there too.

Also in Cora Creek CSD, the principal reported about the building professional development team he has put together called Culturally Responsive Teaching, Learning, and Leading. It consists of teachers and administrators and meets monthly to take up the notion that "we were kind of troubled by the fact that we didn't think that these students who represented previously underrepresented groups were performing that well." He gave credit to the Academic Administrator for World Languages for raising awareness about underrepresented student sub groups and for leading professional development to help teachers and administrators across the district.

Similarly, in Kelly Rock CSD, the Poverty Committee was developed to bring interested and knowledgeable staff together and facilitate their best thinking about how to provide professional development and find solutions for children in poverty. The coordinator for professional development in Kelly Rock CSD explained setting up the district wide poverty committee:

> And then that summer I brought in a high school psychologist and elementary class teacher, elementary counselor and a junior high school student- assistance counselor who I know are at the top of their game and very interested in this topic, to be my advisors on the topic, to say how do we start to get some of this information out. That's where the poverty committee first started. (We then said) that we would have a district wide poverty committee too, so that there could be more than four of us so that we could have people in each of the buildings as part of the team.

One teacher on this committee further described the representation on the team and the powerful learning that occurred. The Kelly Rock CSD special education teacher found that her experience on the district poverty committee shifted her thinking.

> It (the poverty committee) started at the end of September or early October and we met once a month for the entire school year. It was a great; I loved it. I felt like it opened my eyes to a lot and I just I felt like we all learned from each other. There was probably 17 people on it, ranging from teachers to administrators and it was run (by the district leaders).

Evidence of sustained professional learning opportunities was evident in each of these three districts in that they partnered with teachers to plan learning experiences, to create lasting buy in and to share knowledge and support one another

Resources. At times, these three suburban districts called upon external experts in the field to address their administrative teams and entire faculty. They also partnered with local and state agencies and providers of professional development to work with subsections of teachers and administrators on subjects including gender identity, poverty simulation, needs of ELL students and inherent bias. Expertise on developing cultural competence and instructional strategies suitable for ELLs and low SES students was provided by a variety of external resources including attendance at conferences and partnerships with external experts in the field of cultural competency, inclusive practices and work with children in poverty.

These three districts also maximized internal knowledge from within their own teaching and administrative faculty and invited their respective district professionals to teach classes and facilitate professional learning sessions. Learning experiences included

large and small group sessions including key note speakers, individual and team

conference attendance, experiential simulations, book study groups, facilitated discussion

groups and faculty meeting work sessions.

Each district described their efforts to achieve a careful balance between bringing

in expertise from outside the district and balancing that with ongoing learning

opportunities from administrators and faculty from within the district. The district

coordinators of professional development from all three districts discussed bringing in

experts in the areas they are trying to develop (cultural competence, understanding

poverty and inclusive classrooms) to speak with larger groups of administrators, teachers

or the entire staff and then following that with trainings or discussion groups facilitated

by their own teachers and administrators.

The following illustration from Mount David CSD showed their interest in

seeking expertise beyond the Capital Region, working together as a team of teachers and

administrators and a commitment to acting upon the feedback of their teachers. The

coordinator for professional development from Mound David CSD explained:

> We had a team who went to (a central NY university) inclusive schools'
>
> leadership institute over the summer and (the presenter) was a keynote there. And
>
> the teachers who were there with me really liked him and wanted to learn more
>
> from him so we are going to bring him into the district.

Cora Creek CSD and Mount David CSD described very intensive professional

learning experiences they implemented that included ongoing partnerships with

consultants who offer training to teachers and then follow up with classroom visits and

specific feedback sessions about how to improve instruction. For example, a Cora Creek

CSD high school math teacher described previous training he received while he was

teaching in the alternative education program in his high school. As part of that program,

a small group of teachers engaged in professional learning with other teachers and

administrators. They were also paired with a researcher from a local university who

taught them strategies that worked with struggling students and students with diverse

backgrounds. She then observed their teaching during class and provided feedback. This

Cora Creek CSD math teacher talked about the impact it had on him:

> It did help me because I learned how to deal with those types of kids.   For the
>
> racially, ethnically diverse kids, I was fortunate enough to be part of (local
>
> university) in a year- long program. It was really good. We started with research
>
> on types of kids, what strategies would work for these students and we tried to
>
> implement those strategies. This was the year we grouped those kids in the same
>
> math and science class…. She came to (the school) once a month and we talked
>
> about strategies and at the end of year, there was a week- long program for any of
>
> the math or science teachers and some down state and upstate teachers. We
>
> presented at that program. That was good for the whole year.

This teacher valued this partnership with a consultant and working with other

peers in the program because it offered ongoing feedback and support. He also went on to

caution that although professional development on strategies that work for diverse

populations have been offered through faculty meetings or in voluntary sessions in Cora

Creek CSD, in his view, neither of these approaches is as thorough as the kind of support

provided by the consultant with whom he worked.

Mount David CSD also valued the power of using an ongoing consultant to

support shifts in instructional practice. In an effort to fully support the implementation of the co teaching, fully inclusive model, the coordinator for professional development in Mount David CSD described this scenario he arranged at one elementary school.

> (A consultant has) been coming to our district for two plus years now. Most recently she spent a day and a half at (elementary school) and we did a couple of things but the focus was really around several classes that have gained students who had formally been self-contained…. she's spent a good portion of the time directly observing the instructional practices of the co-teachers, consulting directly with them, debriefing about her observations and reflections on the instruction that she observed and then engaging the whole staff in conversation, fishbowl conversation about what was observed, what was effective, what were some things that maybe are still developing?

In these cases, ongoing feedback with the consultant allowed for specific conversations with teachers about teaching and learning.

Implementation. According to interview participants, professional development was often provided during faculty meetings yet in a variety of formats, and in response to needs identified by educators on planning committees. Cora Creek CSD, Kelly Rock CSD and Mount David CSD made use of monthly faculty meeting time to layer on more professional development about developing cultural competence and increasing knowledge about the needs of children in poverty and with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints.

One principal in Cora Creek CSD spoke about his use of faculty meetings to engage teachers in new topics and facilitate ongoing discussions with them on a regular

basis. He explained:

> We've tried to use every faculty meeting for a 10 or 15 -minute presentation by
>
> someone to give teachers some information about how to work with certain
>
> groups of kids. So, for example we've had presentations about students who are
>
> questioning their sexuality, their gender. We've had presentations about working
>
> with special education students a little bit differently than maybe we've had
>
> previously. We had a representative from (a local organization) come in to talk to
>
> us about working with kids who are disadvantaged economically… We've also
>
> met with an Iman from the community, the Muslim community is building a
>
> mosque in (local town) so they presented to us and they're coming back to speak
>
> to the larger faculty in April.

The principal from Kelly Rock CSD agrees that imbedding professional

development in faculty meetings creates a routine of ongoing learning with discussions

about current articles and instructional practices. This Kelly Rock elementary principal

sets an expectation that teachers will read material ahead of time and be prepared to

discuss these issues with colleagues. She described her process:

> I try to make each of our faculty meetings a professional development experience,
>
> at least half or more than half of the meeting. We need faculty meeting time to
>
> talk about curriculum, assessment, instruction and culture. We spent a great deal
>
> of time talking about poverty and English Language Learners and changes in how
>
> we have to approach things.

Although the district office coordinator of professional development explained

her work with efforts to build capacity in cultural proficiency among administrators, it

became clear from one teacher participant that not all principals in Kelly Rock CSD devote as much time to professional development during faculty meetings. A high school math teacher in Kelly Rock CSD pointed out that she would like more follow-up to the training she attended on issues of poverty. She explained that attending the poverty simulation was very powerful:

> So, we did that. But there wasn't a lot of follow-up; we did the activity, debriefed about it and then that was kind of it. So, I really liked the activity and it gave us an idea what some families are dealing with but I just wish there was more (follow up). Now that we did this, how do I make sure that if this is happening I'm the most supportive that I can be?

The high school principal in Mount David CSD also talked about his use of faculty meeting time for professional development and explained the importance of studying the data with teachers, having various speakers work with the faculty and giving students an opportunity to partner with faculty and together learn more about having appreciation for differences. This Mount David high school principal explained:

> We try to use faculty meetings for professional development as much as we can. We've had different speakers come in from the (local LGBTQ) about gender issues…. We also look at the data…. And some of that data was pretty eye opening, and this was part of our discussion about inclusion too, as far as the types of classes that those kids seem to be funneled into, for lack of a better term. And (we were) really asking the question, are they given as much access and opportunity as everybody else?

To further emphasize the balance between conferring with outside experts and maximizing the use of expertise within, each district described faculty and administrators that served as facilitators for ongoing professional development. In Cora Creek CSD, content area specialists and teachers led discussion groups and book studies. In Mount David CSD, the coordinator for professional development explained that the Director of Pupil Personnel and two special education administrators facilitated half day professional development sessions with co teachers so that they could continue the inclusion work with internal expertise and build from what was provided by outside expertise.

Teachers in Kelly Rock CSD spoke of the variety of learning opportunities offered in that district. A first-grade teacher in Kelly Rock CSD appreciated and learned from the variety of opportunities for professional development whether it was through voluntary sessions or district wide initiatives. She said:

> At any point, we can submit ideas for professional development and then it gets posted on our website and teachers can sign up to take those classes. So, that's at the district level. If there is something that you want, you can look there first. (If not) then I can go to my principal if I find something that I'm very interested in and fill out the paperwork and most often we can do it.

An elementary special education teacher in the same district also recalled professional development on issues of poverty and group discussions around that topic that were sustained throughout the year.

> We had one of our professional development days… and it was about different topics that come up around poverty…. We were broken up randomly into groups and we talked about them, problem solved and we came back together and talked

about them and they were referenced again during staff meetings for the rest of the year.

It became evident throughout these interviews that teachers and leaders alike believed that their districts offered a wide range of professional development offerings and valued input from and partnership with teachers as leaders in this work. They valued a balance between drawing upon the expertise among the staff and calling upon outside expertise when needed.

This evidence reveals that district leaders partnered with building leaders and teachers to set priorities, seek out meaningful resources from experts within and beyond their districts and build capacity among those on district professional development committees that build capacity among other educators creating the base for lasting change. It also indicates that teacher participants were most knowledgeable about the kinds of professional development offered to them through external experts and by their colleagues and less knowledgeable about the kinds of professional development offered to administrators. However, the participants were not aware of systematic procedures for evaluating the degree to which professional development shifts instructional practice and that the teacher participants had less insight into the connection between cultural proficiency professional development, curriculum standards and student achievement.

Research Question 3. What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students? When analyzing the data to determine the types of learning environments created, the researcher was attentive to descriptions from teachers about how they developed a culturally responsive learning environment in their classrooms and from principals about how they work as a building

and district to move toward a culturally proficient environment. This information is organized according to district. The researcher was also interested in gaining perspective about the role of the principal in leading a culturally proficient system from both the principal and the teachers' perspective. This is detailed in *Principal leadership and a culturally proficient learning environment* and *Teacher's perception of principal leadership.*

Thirteen out of seventeen participants responded that the suburban schools in this study created support systems for low SES children and families resulting in a learning environment where low SES children have greater access to learning activities and school events. Further, in an effort to foster a learning environment where all people are appreciated and feel a sense of belonging, suburban schools in this study implemented activities in classrooms and in the larger community where children could learn more about the traditions and beliefs of various cultures.   Ten participants noted a greater understanding among some teachers about use of differentiation strategies for ELLs and for students with differing backgrounds.

As noted in Table 9, evidence from interviews with district office coordinators of professional development (3), principals (3), and teachers (8), demonstrated that the principals in this study set the tone in their buildings and prioritized the importance of creating a culturally proficient learning environment, one where students and educators alike promote a school culture where people of all backgrounds are appreciated and supported.

Eleven teacher participants across all three suburban districts studied, having all participated in professional development designed to instill cultural proficiency,

described a learning environment, in the classroom and in the larger school that is supportive of all students; one where children's needs are provided for and their viewpoints and cultural experiences are welcomed and valued. All three districts set up systems for purchasing and distributing school supplies and food items for families in need. To meet the needs of their growing ELL population, all three districts enhanced the ENL program with the additional teachers and professional development offered to ENL teachers and regular education co teachers. Also evident in all three districts were extra - curricular activities that provided information and raised awareness about people from different cultures.

Cora Creek Central School District. Cora Creek CSD interview participants described the efforts they were making to demonstrate an appreciation for all cultures and for children of varying socio – economic backgrounds, and the work they still needed to do to shift instructional practices to become a culturally proficient system. Cora Creek CSD high school special education teacher explained their recent creation of the Muslim Student Association. She explained that this group formed so Muslim students could support each other and hold activities to help non-Muslim students understand their beliefs and traditions. Her belief was that the need for this club grew in response to the political climate during the 2016 political campaign and continued through the election of President Trump. At the time of this interview, President Trump was proposing a ban on immigrants from six Muslim majority countries. The Cora Creek CSD special education teacher recalled;

> Last year I was approached by some kids who wanted me to be the advisor for
> Muslim Student Association. In my years here I've found that that is a group of

kids who really struggle. And there has been bullying and a lot of misunderstanding of what it means to be Muslim…. Now in the past, last year we had a decent number of kids 12-15 kids showing up and then this year we've got about 4 and I think it's sort of the political environment. …At our committee meeting two months ago we had an Imam from a new mosque in (local township) come in and he and I are going to work together to try and (find out) what's happening…because he's talked to the kids and they said they don't really want to stick their necks out. And we're trying to do positive things like we had a toiletry drive for the refugee center. There's a Muslim soup kitchen that we're going to volunteer at so we're trying to sort of change the mindset that Muslim equals terrorist.

Cora Creek CSD high school math teacher reiterated the need for more work in developing a school climate that appreciates different cultural experiences. He praised the ENL program and the efforts made by those who hosted a school festival held on a Saturday where families from different ethnic backgrounds exhibited their foods and cultural traditions like music and dancing. This high school math teacher talked about this being a positive event, yet usually not attended by anyone other than minority students and their families and challenged the district to do more;

For kids from different cultural backgrounds, we have a really good ENL program here. The teachers are really great but I think we could do more because the population is growing. This is such a white school. We have a day called (district festival). On a Saturday, lots of different people of different cultures come together and there is food and things like that. It is outside of school and I think

we should have this during the school day. They get a decent turn out, but it is the culturally diverse community.

Cora Creek CSD high school math teacher went on to explain clubs and events that were designed to raise awareness about beliefs and traditions of different cultures yet their activism was inconsistent and participation was most often from minority groups and not from the white middle- class majority.   He referenced the Muslim Student Association mentioned by the high school special education teacher and while he felt it could be more active, he understood that it was difficult for them because they were not embraced by white students.

Cora Creek CSD high school special education teacher also explained the efforts made at the high school to assist students in poverty so that they felt like they could still fit in a school where many middle- class students wore more expensive clothes and had expensive electronics. The district supported families with food through a backpack program and the high school also assisted with things like the price of a yearbook or a ticket to the prom. This special educator explained, "I think it (the yearbook) is $65 or $70 this year so the yearbook advisor reaches out to those of us, to me and a couple of other people. I just got three kids free yearbooks."

An ENL teacher in Cora Creek CSD made contributions to creating and sustaining an environment where all children were appreciated and given the supports they needed to succeed in school. Beyond her duties of assessing students' language proficiency and providing instruction, this teacher worked with the families of ELL students so they had access to school information and felt welcome at school events.

Through her interactions with families, she too came to understand cultural differences

and students' needs. This ENL teacher discussed her interactions with families;

> Interacting with their families is a little trickier when you're dealing with the ENL
>
> population…. I've done home visits which are awesome. Partially because you
>
> really get to understand the dynamics but also because in other cultures teachers are
>
> so revered that when you go, the thing I learned is if you go you have to be ready to
>
> sit and have dinner.

She went on to explain assistance the schools provided so ENL families could fully

participate in school events.

> We invite (ENL) parents in and have a parent orientation program every fall. At the
>
> elementary level, they have parent conferences and we provide translators for that.
>
> Our parent orientation we had a program that they could read in multiple languages
>
> this year. In past years, we've had translators usually who sit with the group and
>
> we'd present and then they would explain. I think we try hard.

Cora Creek CSD high school math teacher summarized the efforts made to create a

culturally proficient learning environment in his district when he explained the systems in

place to support students in need with tutoring programs or school supplies and food as

well as the efforts made to increase cultural understanding through district festivals, clubs

and collaborative approaches to ENL instruction. Yet he also articulated the need to do

more to instill a deeper sense of appreciation for people from different cultures.

Kelly Rock Central School District. When describing a culturally proficient

learning environment, Kelly Rock CSD teachers talked about the importance of showing

care for all children by keeping in mind the struggles they bring to the classroom every

day, brainstorming strategies for inviting families into school to share cultural traditions and foods and learning new strategies for differentiating instruction. Kelly Rock CSD elementary special education teacher explained that her school was doing more to create an environment where children with different cultural backgrounds were appreciated and their traditions embraced. There were opportunities for families to share customs by participating in events that vary by grade level. For example, she described the fourth-grade Thanksgiving feast as one where families brought food that wasn't necessarily the traditional Thanksgiving food. While creating a culturally responsive environment included welcoming family traditions, two elementary teachers and a high school teacher reported that instructional practices had changed as well.

A Kelly Rock CSD high school math teacher explained the types of differentiation of assignments that was happening in classrooms as a result of the increasing ENL population. However, she pointed out that only some teachers had received training about working with ENL students and because she was not one of them she was only somewhat familiar with this. This high school math teacher explained,

> I know just from being friends with some of the teachers in that hall they have had some kind of revamped homework for the English language learners where it's got more pictures of it and a lot of matching up of a picture to a word or a picture to some sort of symbol…. I think they have many different versions of a document or a homework assignment or even a test they have in general.

Interview narrative revealed that Kelly Rock CSD has begun training their teachers in differentiation strategies for ELLs yet needs to continue this practice in a more comprehensive manner. Beyond use of differentiation strategies, when asked about

creating a culturally proficient learning environment, Kelly Rock CSD first grade teacher also reiterated her interactions with ELLs and extended that thinking to meeting the needs of all children. This first-grade teacher continually returned to the need to give children a foundation that is safe and nurturing as she explained here:

> I can only imagine being a child walking into a classroom and not speaking much and staring at somebody all day long and not understanding what they are saying. So, I think the first think you have to do is let them know that you care about them and you are there to support them and you're meeting those needs first. Their emotional needs first before their academic. I would say that's for cultural difference and for a child that's coming from a family who may have issues with poverty or who are struggling financially, those needs need to be met first.

Teachers and principals in several buildings in Kelly Rock CSD responded to the needs of low SES students in their district by setting up systems where children could be outfitted by donated clothing and fed by a district run food pantry. A special education teacher explained their response when they realized that the poverty rate in their district increased by ten percent in recent years:

> Cinderella's Closet is a whole closet down in our FACS department. It started as just a small closet now it's grown to takes up like their whole office. A student started it…It's not just ties or prom dresses. It's clothes for the whole family. They have baby clothes; they have slippers and shoes. Everything in every size. …Kids go down and literally pick stuff out for their family and bring it home and it's just expanded.

Like Cora Creek, Kelly Rock CSD also offers a backpack food panty program so that they can be assured that they have resources available for poor children. In this way, they foster a learning environment where all children are taken care of increasing their readiness to learn.

Mount David Central School District. Teachers in Mount David CSD, as in the other districts, reported that a learning environment that is responsive to culturally and socio-economically diverse students celebrates cultures with extra -curricular clubs and events tied to the curriculum that encourage students to explore various cultures. The Mount David CSD elementary math specialist defined a culturally responsive school as one that is:

> …developing a culture where we have open minded teachers, teachers that value the diversity of our school…. It is having a strong rapport with the families, letting them know that we value them and that we are open to learning more about a culture. It is the projects, what you see in the hallways, (what is) displayed around the building that shows those students and parents how much we value them.

Mount David CSD high school chemistry teacher agreed with her colleague and described a culturally responsive school as one where "we celebrate what a student's cultural background is, then we embrace that." She explained the upcoming cultural fair:

> It's an all-day event and students have the opportunity to sign up to represent a particular country. It could be what their cultural background is; it could be their ancestry; it could be a country that they have interest in learning about. And the students are fantastic. So, I've had a student that's very interested in Japan and

Japanese culture, yet has no personal ties to it. For this event, they have to have

fully research the culture inside and out.

This event, an important part of the school's culture, fosters an interest in learning about

race and ethnicities different from one's own.

Elementary teachers in Mount David CSD described similar cultural fairs or

school events where various cultures are explored and celebrated. A first-grade teacher

described the event in her school:

The 5th graders share about their culture at cultural day. They have food and

clothing of all the different cultures. Students are walking around in the beautiful

clothing of the culture. The 5th graders love it and the other students look forward

to it. Within our own classrooms, during winter holiday time, we talk about

beliefs, customs and traditions. It brings out learning about everyone's religious

and cultural background. We ask everyone to construct a project to share their

culture…. It was amazing to see all the kids sharing. Each grade level has

different ways to help kids share their traditions.

Mount David CSD high school chemistry teacher also described a student

international club and the students who run booths at this cultural fair along with the

ways in which classroom teachers incorporate visiting the fair and learning about various

cultures into their curriculum. She referenced several other clubs designed to further

multi-cultural understandings. This high school chemistry teacher explained:

Within the past two years we've started a Muslim Student Association, which I

think is directly correlated to the increase we've seen of Muslim students. So, that

Muslim Student Association has really taken off. But generally speaking, we are

just trying to bring a global perspective to the school as a whole. We have an Amnesty International Club, and we have a Model United Nations Club to try to bring a global awareness to all students.

The high school chemistry teacher in Mount David CSD referenced the district's shift toward a more inclusive model for special education students and their development of the co teaching model. This teacher described how her school embraces children with different backgrounds and why the training on differentiation applies to all students. She said, "A lot of people think of that as just the special education aspect of it, … but we've had a lot more training in terms of differentiation to be able to include all students, those from various areas." This statement was also echoed in statements made by the coordinator of professional development in Mount David CSD when he described an environment that embraces a diverse population:

> It's a culture that not just tolerates diversity but really embraces it as a strength. It's a culture that promotes empathy in students to the greatest degree possible that is inclusive of all of our students. A culture that is responsive to their needs and is able to adapt to unique needs…. We've been aggressively pushing this idea of being inclusive in our district and really, I would say for all of our students, I wouldn't pinpoint it to just students with disabilities or ENL students but I think about the instructional strategies that are going to provide an engaging environment for all students, provide access to curriculum for all students.

An elementary teacher in this Mount David CSD also agrees that the district's professional development on inclusion and differentiation for special education students

compliments their work on exploring and embracing cultural beliefs and traditions of students from varying backgrounds.

Principal leadership and a culturally proficient learning environment. All three principals talked about their approach to developing a faculty and student mindset that promoted a learning environment where all children feel appreciated and supported and their differences are viewed as assets to the school environment. Principals described activities that included developing food pantries and backpack programs to assist families in need and creating clubs and school events that inform others about culture and customs.

For example, the Cora Creek CSD high school principal talked about the culture that "accepts kids where they are and then tries to work with them to (move them) where everybody wants them to be." He explained the example he set for his teachers and continually instilled a need for openness and appreciation for the notion that success at school can be difficult for those who do not understand or subscribe to white middle norms. Cora Creek CSD principal stated:

> I think it's pretty clear that if kids don't understand the traditions, the backgrounds, the language, the nuances of the language it's difficult for them to really learn and so again I think that the idea is to try to get teachers to consider many different ways of approaching a topic recognizing that as they look around the classroom with 26 or 27 kids there's many different ethnic, cultural, economic backgrounds represented there. …We've encouraged kids and faculty to have conversations that maybe previously weren't really comfortable for them to have.

Cora Creek CSD principal went on to explain the programs in place to support children struggling financially and activities and events recognizing cultural diversity. He stated that the faculty saw the importance of these initiatives whereas in the past they may not have.

> I think we've tried to look at socioeconomic backgrounds, we've developed the food pantry here and we have about 16 or 17 kids that every Friday get food to bring home so we've tried to take that into consideration. We've started a couple of clubs that I think previously, probably 10 years ago, 15 years ago, people would've said, hmm I'm not sure those are good clubs. Muslim Student Association for example. We have an International Club which focuses the many different cultures that are represented here. We have an international hallway where we have flags of all the countries that we know are represented here. We try to hang those flags…. We encourage our teachers and our music teachers to bring in culturally diverse music and artwork. We have a number of students who question their sexuality, in some cases their gender and so of course we have GLASS (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Spectrum).

In Kelly Rock CSD, the elementary school principal talked about the overall mindset of the faculty and families in her elementary school as one that celebrated cultural difference. This was evident immediately upon entering the school with the large painted mural of the world on the wall in the front hallway. This colorful and engaging mural filled the wall in the front foyer and, as the principal described, represented the school's history of learning about cultures around the world. She explained the mural's history and her leadership on expanding its significance:

I have to tell you I inherited the painting part of it. I think before I came they must

have gone through professional development with the goal of incorporating

"make a difference." So, we're talking probably 15-18 years ago, there were

many cultures represented there in the pictorial and face color and so forth. And it

says, "Make a World of Difference." But then when we started to get so many

kids who speak so many different languages, I said we need to make people feel

welcome here and so all twenty-eight languages that are represented in our school

are up there. We asked families, can you write the word welcome in your

language and then we put it on the overhead projector and traced it and it's

noticed by every family that's new to our building. They walk up there and they

find their language. Farsi is there, and Urdu is there, and Spanish and French and

you know, all the others are there.

This mural created many years ago recognized that people from all over the world make a

difference and this principal expanded on the idea.

This elementary principal in Kelly Rock CSD went on to describe the school

environment and the activities that occurred regularly. Teachers invited families into the

building regularly and found ways for children to share foods, customs and traditions.

Guest speakers with various backgrounds were much a part of this school culture and

continually instilled an understanding about people who come from varying life

experiences. The principal explained:

I am so proud of our school. I am so proud of our staff. Is there teasing, is there

some bullying? Absolutely that's true. I can't say that there isn't but it doesn't

necessarily target any one ethnic background. Our teachers are very welcoming. I

mean all children are created and treated equally here is our belief. Especially in the younger grades when we have parents come in to tell about their cultural heritage and celebrations throughout the year. We have an international food night and so, the entire cafeteria is filled with food from all over the world. So, we have those kinds of celebrations as often as we can. We have things like the Chinese acrobats come in. We've had speakers come in that take on a character role and tell about their life growing up as Jackie Robinson or any particular character. We've had veterans come in, concentration camp survivors come in, so all kinds of things. Teachers will do their very best during the December holidays that make sure that there are projects that represent all of the cultures that are celebrated here.

In Mount David CSD, the high school principal explained the district's ongoing efforts to develop a learning environment where students and teachers understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses and the importance of having resources and supportive people available for all people. He described the impact of a powerful training held for 70 students and 13 teachers in his building at the beginning of the school year that helped illustrate the difficulties all people face and the support network available to overcome hardship when it surfaces. He explained that the lasting messages from this training resonated out among teachers and students causing improvement in the building climate. Mount David CSD principal explained:

It's about being an ally and supportive to people regardless of who they are or where they come from because we all have, again, we all have our own struggles

and our own issues. So, that's kind of taken off even though it's new I see that kind of taking off in a good direction.

A Mount David CSD principal went on to explain that beyond instilling a need for recognizing children's struggles and supporting their needs, he continually emphasized an inclusive model. He talked about starting school each year with a reminder to students that all students matter. One example was their work creating an identity on social media that students were part of and that represented the larger student body emphasizing that all students make up a larger "we" of their school district. Mount David CSD principal explained:

> I think that with a lot of the programs that we have done, even when we have our beginning of the year assemblies with the kids, we really focus on integrity and acceptance, tolerance, and cyber safety of course. But it really is about (a district identity); we have a hashtag we started a few years ago, #wearemountdavid. And we kind of keep going back to that too, we are Mount David. "WE," it's all of us. We're inclusive. We have made a commitment to being more inclusive as far as special education goes…. So, that again, that is one piece but it shows a direction that we are moving in. Yeah, that's kind of special education related but it's part of a bigger piece where it's about we are all together.

The inclusion model went beyond promoting this ideal within the broader learning community in the building. The Mount David CSD principal described how approaches to instruction changed given the structural shifts to a co- teaching model. With professional development and collaboration, teachers adjusted their practice to

include differentiation and individualized approaches to learning more often. The

principal described:

> There has been a change in practice. There almost has to be when you notice the
>
> changes that we have and then also when you create co-teaching scenarios where
>
> now kids who may have been in a self-contained classroom are now in a regular
>
> classroom and where ESL students are no longer pulled out but are also included.
>
> You have to change your practice. …We've had significant conversations and
>
> training on what grading means in a diverse classroom. Not only what grading
>
> means but what does mastery look like? Personal learning objectives? Things
>
> along those lines. It's slow work though.

Teachers' perception of principal leadership. The teachers interviewed in this

study were also asked to speak about the role of the building principal in addressing the

needs of a changing demographic and leading cultural proficiency professional

development. Eight teachers interviewed in this study, across all three suburban districts,

stated clearly that a strong leader finds resources to help children and their families,

facilitates ongoing professional development and creates a learning environment where

all children are embraced. The elementary teacher in Kelly Rock CSD spoke of her

principal as someone who goes out of her way to see that families have what they need

and that faculty is continually thinking about how to build relationships with families as a

means to increase student outcomes. She said of her principal:

> She is amazing when it comes to connecting with families and reaching families.
>
> She is very open, she is very approachable, she will do anything she can. We've
>
> had families that have gone through fires, through illnesses. I can't tell you how

often she'll throw out an email, let's have a dress down for this family and let's raise money. … she is open and approachable but she doesn't just stop there. She makes sure that when she's meeting with us (during the APPR process) and talking about the lessons that we've done, she asks, "How have you involved families this year, how are you connecting to your parents?"

Another teacher in Mount David CSD also spoke of the role of the principal as creating opportunities for teachers to share knowledge and learn from one another. One elementary teacher explained, "Our principal helps facilitate the district's plans by having our ENL teachers here work with us." This Mount David elementary teacher went on to say that the principal also, "does a good job making sure that children feel respected, and that they can be the same but different therefore, respecting their cultures." The math teacher in Cora Creek CSD also spoke highly of the important role the building principal plays in finding resources for students and teachers and building in time for teachers to learn about instructional strategies that work in a more diverse student population.

He supported us when we needed it, like when it was creating time for the group of us to meet or he would try to provide some funds. The principal has never said no to anything in that situation. He is more of a supporter in what we have been doing. In the faculty meetings, he is pretty strong at least in getting others to present about these topics. He has a big plate and the population is increasing so it is more relevant.

It was evident from the teachers interviewed in this study that all three principals worked from an assets-based inclusive viewpoint and were influential in opening up dialogue among faculty members and implementing programs to further develop a

learning environment where all children and all families are appreciated. The findings for this research question, gleaned from interview evidence from the participants in all three districts, revealed the following qualities of a school environment that embraces children from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The number of participants that identified each quality is noted in parenthesis.

- Valued children with different cultural backgrounds (16).

- Differentiated Instruction (8).

- Supported needs of ELLs and their families (10).

- Provided food, materials and other resources for families in poverty (13).

- Created extra- curricular clubs that provide general knowledge about and celebrate minority populations (5).

- Created opportunities for families to demonstrate or describe traditions (10).

- Hosted cultural festivals (8).

- Emphasized children's assets rather than expressing continual frustration with children's weaknesses (5).

- Demonstrated respect for difficult circumstances of families in poverty and its impact on learning (15).

- Developing relationships with the families of children with diverse backgrounds (10).

Research Question 4. In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a cultural proficient system? All three district coordinators for professional development described their plan for providing additional professional development on exploring

inherent bias, understanding issues related to children in poverty and on differentiation and inclusion. District coordinators for professional development discussed the need to review policies and practices to assure access and equity for all children. Table 10 lists the priorities, stated by district coordinators and/or principals, for future development of a culturally proficient system. Themes that emerged were ongoing professional development, review of grading and homework policies, continued efforts to provide food and other resources to poor children and their families, opportunity to learn from fellow teachers, specifically ENL teachers, about strategies that work with diverse learners. The emphasis on engaging families and building relationships with families was most evident in Cora Creek CSD and Kelly Rock CSD.

Table 10

Priorities* for future development toward a culturally proficient system according to district coordinators for professional development and principals.

	Cora Creek CSD	Kelly Rock CSD	Mount David CSD
Provide ongoing PD for teachers and school leaders focused on strategies for children in poverty and developing culturally proficient practices and systems.	x	x	x
Provide ongoing PD for teachers and school leaders focused on inclusive instructional practices and school practices.			x
Continue district committees focused on understanding children and families in poverty	x	x	
Continue district committees focused on understanding minority children and families	x	x	
Remove barriers for children in poverty by providing materials and resources.	x	x	x
Review practices that present barriers for low SES and ENL families. Establish systems to assist them (ie. Translators, meetings at home or at times and locations that work with job schedules).	x	x	
Review approaches to discipline.	x	x	x
Review policies/practices (homework, grading, technology, additional fees etc.) to ensure they don't limit access to educational opportunities for minorities and children in poverty.	x	x	x
Review library collection to ensure it is representative of a diverse community.	x		
Learn from/work more closely with ENL teachers.	x		x
Support teachers as they try new instructional approaches and shift practices to asset- based/ inclusive approach.	x	x	x
Review purchasing practices to ensure instructional materials support an anti -bias learning environment.	x		
Engage in regular conversations with teachers about challenges faced by low SES and minority children, the impact on learning and ability to engage in school activities.	x	x	x
Set high expectations for all children and support their needs.	x	x	x
Evaluate whether meeting the needs of every student.			x
Examine recruitment and hiring practices to increase diversity among faculty and staff.	x		

*As reported by interview participants.

When analyzing narrative regarding current practices in classrooms,

educator mindset about children in poverty and people of color, and future plans to

develop a culturally proficient system, the researcher categorized each district and

interview participants along the continuum of cultural proficiency. Table 11 shows the

position of each district along the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (CampbellJones,

CampbellJones, & Lindsey, 2010). Kelly Rock CSD and Mount David CSD are emerging

from Cultural Pre-Competence moving toward Cultural Competence. Cora Creek CSD is

emerging from Cultural Competence moving toward Cultural Proficiency.

Table 11: District position along The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Adapted from The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Description and Action (CampbellJones, CampbellJones, & Lindsey, 2010).
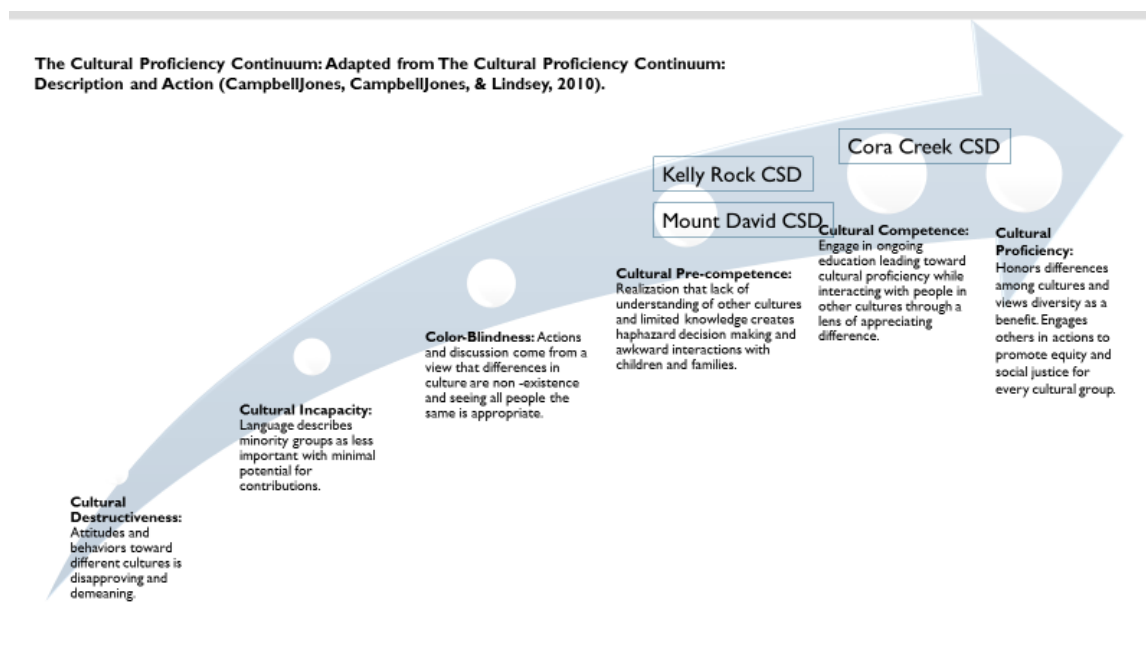
Table 12 shows that eight teachers meet some criteria of cultural pre- competence

and some criteria of cultural competence. The perspectives offered by district office

coordinators of professional development and principals in all three districts as well as

one teacher in all three districts revealed a true understanding about what it means to be a

culturally proficient system. These culturally proficient educators spoke passionately

about approaching all children with an asset based mindset, embracing different cultures

and family experiences, and changing practices and policy that create barriers for people

of color and low SES children.

Although these three districts have worked hard over the last three years to provide cultural proficiency professional development and re shape approaches to instruction and relationships with all children, administrators and teachers noted that they have more work to do to achieve cultural proficiency. Cora Creek CSD is furthest along the continuum, nearing cultural proficiency, because teachers, principals and district administrator talk about reviewing homework policies, board policies about access to coursework and extra- curricular activities and has systems in place to review curriculum purchases through a cultural and equity lens.

Table 12

Interview participants ranking according to the Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Adapted from The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Description and Action (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

	Cora Creek CSD	Kelly Rock CSD	Mount David CSD
Cultural Destructiveness: Attitudes and behaviors toward different cultures is disapproving and demeaning.			
Cultural Incapacity: Language describes minority groups as less important with minimal potential for contributions.			
Color-Blindness: Actions and discussion come from a view that differences in culture are non -existence and seeing all people the same is appropriate.		.	
Cultural Pre-competence: Realization that lack of understanding of other cultures and limited knowledge creates haphazard decision making and awkward interactions with children and families.	T(3)	T(3)	T(2)
Cultural Competence: Engage in ongoing education leading toward cultural proficiency while interacting with people in other cultures through a lens of appreciating difference.	D	D	D
Cultural Proficiency: Honors differences among cultures and views diversity as a benefit. Engages others in actions to promote equity and social justice for every cultural group.	DC, P, T(1)	DC, P, T(1)	DC, P, T(1)

DC- District Coordinator of Prof. Dev.; P – Principal; T – Teacher; D - District

The Cora Creek CSD coordinator for professional development spoke passionately about the importance of approaching children and families with the right mindset and how that mindset shapes all other interactions throughout teaching and learning.

> The most important work we can do is work with all of our staff to think about how they confront their own biases about all ranges of students and families be it white and economically wealthy, white and poor, black and poor, or black and wealthy. We have all ranges of students and families who've had different experiences with school and I think the more we can have all our staff start from a place of welcoming and engaging families, sincerely engaging families and having an open dispositional orientation of not making assumptions about what on the surface may translate into something deeper for those families. And also, the other thing is to start with the understanding that all families want the best for their child and expect the best from their school system.

This administrator further explained the importance of finding the right entry point with professional development when working with educators about cultural bias. She explained that educators are more comfortable talking about issues associated with poverty yet when discussing race and ethnicity there is a tendency to raise defense mechanisms. Her thoughts about developing a readiness to learn among adults as essential for achieving cultural proficiency are described here:

He (a consultant) talks about different entry points and data is not compelling to everybody. I thought that that was really fascinating so now I think I'm in a place where you have to think about the different possible entry points to generate the conversation with people differently. But for our teachers in terms of how well they are receiving it (discussion about bias) and where they are at there is a level of discomfort, there is concern about, there is an undertone in the conversation with this professional development that someone is discretely trying to call me racist?

The Cora Creek CSD coordinator of professional development described the Checklist: Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment they are using throughout the district when selecting instructional materials. For example, this checklist asks teachers and administrators to consider whether instructional material includes content and visuals that reflect the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds and whether it promotes an understanding of the values and behaviors that support cultural diversity. This checklist challenges educators to question the selections they are making to ensure that these materials maintain high expectations for all students and advocacy for all groups of people is evident. This exemplifies the work Cora Creek CSD is doing to challenge faculty members to examine their tendency toward color blindness and move from cultural pre- competence toward cultural proficiency. The coordinator for professional development in Cora Creek CSD also talked about the work she and the superintendent are doing with the Board of Education about what it means to be culturally proficient and she reported that the board is very supportive of this work in large part due to the leadership of the superintendent.

The practices identified by the educators in Kelly Rock CSD and Mount David CSD are more characteristic of a culturally competent system. These educators talk about a shift from deficit thinking to asset – based thinking, one where children of different backgrounds are cared for and the appreciated. Striving for inclusive practices is a goal of both districts. Kelly Rock CSD sees itself in the midst of ongoing initiatives to better serve students in poverty and to provide ongoing professional development to support teachers as they reflect upon their practices in light of this increase in low income students and a more diverse population.

The Kelly Rock CSD coordinator for professional development explained her challenge of maintaining the momentum of these initiatives, "I think the biggest thing that we are trying to do is really use the meetings with all of the administrators so that they keep it going in their individual buildings." She also plans to continue to hold building leaders accountable for their progress in delivering professional development and ensuring a culturally proficient environment. She described the process for this:

> After the summer training of all the administrators, they were then asked to set
> goals for each of their individual buildings related to better meeting the needs of
> students and families in poverty…. They had a night where they had to present to
> the board what each of the schools was doing, what they had accomplished thus
> far, and what they intended to accomplish…Some buildings, just depending on
> priority needs and teacher and principal interest, have gone a lot farther.

The Kelly Rock CSD coordinator of professional development described ongoing professional development that supports the inclusion model, the co-teaching model and supports teachers as they shift their practice away from more traditional approaches to

teaching and assessment. According to this Kelly Rock CSD administrator, an important next step to move from cultural competence to cultural proficiency is to look at existing grading practices, reflect upon alignment with current practices and consider a more flexible approach to grading policies.

> So, an obvious next step I would say for us is to really rethink how it is we are grading students and start to be a little bit more open to the idea that not everything has to be standardized, that individualized (assessment) can happen. And that's a philosophical conversation but it's well beyond just philosophy it's also about GPAs and competitiveness.

The coordinator of professional development in Mount David CSD talked about the district's history as a caring community and how the changing demographic has challenged the faculty to examine their practices. As the population is growing in diversity, they need to be more responsive and are trying to adjust instruction and school climate from a cultural competent system to a culturally proficient system.

> I think we've always had a very strong culture when it comes to diversity. That was never really an area of concern. But it's an area that has expanded beyond where we were. So even though we've always been a, I think, a very accepting and caring community around diversity I think there are definitely some shifts that are happening much more rapidly than what we are used to. The volume of English language learners has caused people to really have to adjust. And not just accept and tolerate but now they have to think about ways that they can actually capture that diversity because it's so in their face now. How do they capture that and actually make that one of those strength- based approaches to instruction?

There's still work to be done there but I think that gradually there are some

changes I'm observing that I think are good changes.

The district administrators who oversee professional development, the building

principal and the teacher participants in all three districts in this study articulated the need

for and described future plans for continued work toward a culturally proficient school

system. Themes that emerged were continued efforts to provide food and other resources

to poor children and their families and ongoing professional development with

opportunities to learn from fellow teachers, specifically ENL teachers, about strategies

that work with diverse learners.

All three districts planned to maintain collaborative teams that would plan

ongoing professional development efforts and review of district practices such as grading

and homework policies. Educators in Cora Creek CSD also articulated the value in

reviewing their recruitment and hiring practices to increase diversity among faculty and

staff. Participants in Cora Creek CSD further emphasized the potential benefits of

partnering with county agencies to better understand the resources available to children in

poverty and professional development they might offer regarding learning styles and

related family issues of low SES children. Emphasis on engaging families and building

relationships with families was most evident in Cora Creek CSD and Kelly Rock CSD.

Summary of Findings

The evidence indicates that Cora Creek CSD, Kelly Rock CSD and Mount David

CSD provided professional development about creating an environment that is more

inclusive and responsive to the needs of a diverse population. Participating in poverty

simulations was noted by thirteen participants, both teachers and administrators, as very

powerful experiences. The Cora Creek CSD coordinator of professional development

expressed that inherent bias and diversity trainings requires sensitivity and can elicit

defensive responses from educators.

       This researcher found that these three suburban districts delivered professional

development in accordance with four tenets (learning communities, leadership, resources

and implementation) of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning

Standards (2011) by working with teachers on professional development committees to

set priorities and select methods of delivery. Professional development was delivered in

a range of format with use of outside experts and with professionals from within the

district. Teachers were given time monthly in faculty meetings and during voluntary

sessions to discuss what they had learned and tried in their classrooms and seek feedback

from their peers and expert coaches in some cases. Interview participants in all three

districts articulated a strong belief in creating a learning environment where children's

needs are provided for, where children and families of all cultures and beliefs feel valued

and where there are opportunities to learn about customs and beliefs different from one's

own.

       Although there was little evidence about use of data to inform professional

development or measure its effectiveness, principals and teachers in this study reported a

shift in their interactions with children and families to a more inclusive and

nonjudgmental approach. They acknowledged that their participation in ongoing

professional development heightened their awareness of personal bias and recommended

that their schools continue with these trainings and create a system where more educators

engage in cultural proficiency professional development. Achieving and sustaining a

culturally proficient system requires educators to routinely question daily practices and school policies and determine if they limit access for any group of children or if instead they enhance the capacity of all learners. Although not asked to describe themselves using the characteristics of the cultural proficiency continuum (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010), the participants in these three districts report that they are still striving to achieve sustainable cultural proficiency.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Suburban schools, once made up of a white student majority and known for their successful achievement rates and large numbers of students attending college, are now seeing an increase in minority populations and a greater number of families in poverty (Frey, 2011; Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011). This changing demographic in suburban schools reflects the increasing minority population across the United States; including what are now more diverse suburban communities, many that are struggling to meet the needs of their children and families (Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Mikelbank, 2004).

Many suburban teachers hold a deficit point of view toward children living in poverty or whose racial or ethnic backgrounds are different than their own race (Frankenberg & Ayscue, 2013). They can be easily frustrated with the needs of low SES children and tend to view the beliefs and cultural traditions of minority groups negatively (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; Garcia, 2002). Further, suburban teachers lack training about implicit bias, cultural responsiveness and strategies that enhance learning for children in poverty (Ullucci & Battey, 2011).

Extended training in culturally responsive teaching is necessary to shift a deficit mindset to one that expresses full appreciation for all children and recognizes the value added by the viewpoints, beliefs and behaviors of a diverse community (Ebersol, Kanahele-Mossman & Kawakami, 2015; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). This study builds on the literature on suburban school districts' practices for providing culturally proficiency

professional development and informs professional development designed to develop culturally responsive mindsets among teachers and create school cultures that embrace diversity.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of professional learning in developing cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional practices that are responsive to the needs of racially and ethnically diverse student groups and students of poverty. For this phenomenological research study, the researcher conducted interviews with a district administrator/coordinator of professional development, the principal, eleven teachers (elementary and/or middle school and/or high school) in three suburban districts in upstate New York. The researcher defined quality professional development as training given to building leaders and teachers within the last five years to develop cultural proficiency and effective instructional strategies to assist economically disadvantaged and diverse student groups.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?

2. Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning?

3. What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students?

4. In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a cultural proficient system?

This chapter includes a summary and discussion of the analysis of the major findings noted in Chapter 4 and recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, recommendations for further research will be explored in this chapter.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?

Finding #1. The three coordinators of professional development stated that each of their districts designed professional development opportunities with the intention of developing greater sensitivity among teachers and school leaders toward children and families living in poverty. To accomplish this, teachers and school leaders were encouraged to attend interactive poverty simulations, participate in professional-reading/book-club sessions with colleagues, or attend conferences. This finding supports previous research that describes the need for educators to continually remind themselves that not all children have the benefits of a middle-class lifestyle consistent with that of their middle- class teachers. (Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011).

Finding #2. Thirteen participants out of the seventeen from the three districts in this study also described their shift in mindset from a deficit view to one that values children with different racial, ethnic and SES backgrounds as a result of participating in professional development offered by their districts. As seen in Gorski's (2013) work, these educators reported that they are more likely to see children's strengths rather than

expressing frustration about their lack of resources or readiness for school. Professional learning opportunities in these districts also included best practices that assist low income children and methods for engaging low income families in the school environment. This study further supports findings in the literature review that speak to the need to maintain positive, supportive relationships with children and families and reconsider school traditions and instructional practices that present barriers for low income families. (Jensen, 2009; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009; Gorski, 2013).

Finding #3. Two of these three suburban districts offered professional learning experiences for school leaders and teachers aimed at developing an awareness of implicit bias, cultural responsiveness, and cultural diversity. This finding is consistent with Cooper, Ye & Levin (2011), who describe how effective professional development opens opportunities for educators to reflect upon their own racial and cultural identities and appreciate those of their students. Two of the districts in this study implemented professional development that fostered a culturally competent mindset and increased knowledge about how to create a judgement free environment and respect for students' culture. In the third district, professional development about implicit bias and recognizing assets in all children was provided in the context of developing a full inclusion model for special education students and ELLs. All three districts provided professional development on understanding the needs of and best practices that better serve ELLs.

Conclusion for Research Question 1. Professional development provided in all three school districts was aimed at helping teachers develop a better understanding of children living in poverty and the way life experiences and family culture influences how children learn and interact in school. Further the school districts in this study, through

their professional development efforts, continually reinforced the need to recognize the strengths of all children rather than linger in deficit thinking.

Research Question 2: Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning?

Finding #4. These three suburban districts adhered to four tenets (Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Implementation) of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S., 2011) when planning professional development that focused on developing cultural proficiency, understanding the needs of low SES children, and creating a full inclusion model for all learners. As is recommended by Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsh, S. (2011), this finding showed that district leaders in these three districts partnered with building leaders and teachers to set priorities. They sought out meaningful resources from experts within and beyond their districts that would then build capacity within district professional development committee members. Further, these partnerships with principals and teachers were designed to create a ground swell for lasting change of mindset and instructional practice.

Hord (2009) explains that the quality of teaching improves with continuous professional learning that is meaningful, standards- based, and job embedded. Although the findings of this study support Hord's (2009) recommendation that when Professional Learning Standards are applied, educators partner in setting learning goals, and determine the approach and venue for learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion, & Hirsch, 2011) it also became evident that more work was needed to align culturally proficient professional

development to standards and to measure the effectiveness in changing student achievement outcomes.

Finding #5. Although identified in the Professional Learning Standards (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsch, 2011) as important, participants in this study did not speak to the alignment of these professional development opportunities with curriculum standards and did not indicate any evidence of a thorough process for evaluating the outcome of professional learning. There was not enough evidence from those interviewed to indicate that these districts measured the degree to which professional development shaped a more inclusive and asset-based mindset or shifted practices among teachers and principals other than informal observations and anecdotal comments. In each district, professional development designed to develop cultural proficiency was offered for at least three years, albeit with different approaches, entry points or points of emphasis. Interview participants mentioned personal reflections about their own change in mindset or practices and observations of the same among their colleagues, yet no one mentioned a plan for measuring the impact of cultural proficiency professional development. Thus, more research is needed to determine if these districts are in full accordance with the Professional Learning Standards (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsch, 2011).

Finding #6. In all three districts, the district's leaders were expected to participate in professional development designed to create culturally proficient systems, partner with teachers and carry this work into their buildings. Yet, delivery of culturally proficient professional development was inconsistent among teachers in each of the three districts. In some cases, all teachers in an elementary building may have participated in a poverty simulation, while in another building, ENL teachers and their regular education

co teachers learned best practices to better assist ELLs. The Standards for Professional

Learning Standards (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsch, 2011) recognize that designing

professional learning must take into account the need to design adult learning experiences

based on the needs, interests and skill levels of individual learners and therefore not all

professional learning experiences are suited for all learners. Yet, Terrell and Lindsey

(2009) argue that in order to create a culturally proficient environment, culturally

proficient professional development is necessary for all educators.

     The Standards for Professional Learning remind educators of the need to be

"honest about their abilities, practices, challenges, and results" if they are going to

improve their craft (Standards for Professional Learning: Quick Reference Guide, 2016,

p.3). A shift in mindset and practice was evident in those who participated in culturally

proficient professional development; yet participants said it was not pervasive throughout

the district because many staff members fail to recognize the need to learn more about

understanding diversity and elected not to attend trainings of this nature.

    Conclusion for Research Question 2. The findings of this study are not fully

aligned with that of Mizell, Hord, Killion &Hirsch's (2011) recommendation in the

Learning Forward Professional Learning Standards that state that professional learning is

considered quality learning only if it increases educator effectiveness and results in

greater student achievement. Although these districts demonstrated evidence of learning

communities, leadership, resources and implementation, full alignment must a direct and

transparent link to curriculum standards and include a plan to use of assess professional

learning with a variety of data points.

Research Question 3: What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students?

CampbellJones, CampbellJones and Lindsey (2010) found that achieving cultural proficiency occurs when the daily practices of teachers and students honor cultural differences and advocate for social justice for every cultural group and the district's systems and structures support these practices.   When analyzing the data in response to Research Question #3 and #4, the researcher considered the characteristics described in each of the six stages along The Cultural Proficiency Continuum (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010) noted in Table 13.

Table 13

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Adapted from The Cultural Proficiency Continuum: Description and Action (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Precompetence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
Attitudes and behaviors toward different cultures is disapproving and demeaning.	Language describes minority groups as less important with minimal potential for contributions.	Actions and discussion come from a view that differences in culture are non - existence and seeing all people the same is appropriate.	Realization that lack of understanding of other cultures and limited knowledge creates haphazard decision making and awkward interactions with children and families.	Engage in ongoing education leading toward cultural proficiency while interacting with people in other cultures through a lens of appreciating difference.	Honors differences among cultures and views diversity as a benefit. Engages others in actions to promote equity and social justice for every cultural group.

Finding #7. In an effort to move from cultural precompetence to cultural competence (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010), all three districts set up

systems for providing necessary items like food, clothing, transportation, school supplies, and supplemented additional expenses required if students wanted to fully engage in the school's culture. This included field trip fees, club T-shirts, school yearbooks or tickets to school dances and athletic events. They created systems for distributing food and school supplies to those in need through backpack programs. Childcare was often provided at evening meetings or functions and in the case of two districts, transportation to school events was offered to families.

These findings support the work of Howard, Dresser and Dunklee (2009) in that these districts were trying to increase school readiness by contributing to their students' physical wellness and social involvement in the school community along with provide opportunities for low SES children to engage in enrichment experiences that will broaden their knowledge. These findings also demonstrated efforts to find solutions for low income families who, as Jensen (2009) points out, rarely participate in school events during or beyond the school day due to transportation issues.

The educators in these suburban schools reported felling compelled to care for impoverished children and support their families so children and parents could engage more fully in the school community. Solutions that could be taken care of with financial support (i.e. transportation) or through food donation drives (i.e. backpack programs) were put in place in a timely manner. These educators took pride in these kinds of actions because they saw the material contribution they were making and embraced the increased likelihood for student success in school academically and socially.

Finding #8. Schools in these three districts were making efforts to create a more inclusive learning environment, one that CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey

(2010) describe as emerging just beyond cultural pre -competence toward cultural competence. Interview participants in this study frequently referenced the message promoted by building and district leaders regarding the need to create a more inclusive model for ELLs and special education students. Teachers were encouraged to differentiate instruction and find ways for all children to fully contribute to and feel welcome in the school environment.

Eight participants reported that children of various cultures were encouraged to share their beliefs and cultural traditions in a school setting through multi- cultural festivals, holiday feasts and learning fairs. Six participants described extra- curricular clubs, like an Asian American club and a Multi-Cultural club, to serve as a place to showcase cultural experiences and also to discuss instances of discrimination. CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey (2010) point out that cultural competence is demonstrated when opportunities to learn about various cultures is ongoing within the classroom and beyond. In a culturally competent system, students are encouraged to share their experiences and viewpoints and teachers reflect upon their lessons to determine which subgroups of children may be served better by them and what adjustments must be made to serve all learners better.

Finding #9. All eleven teachers interviewed in this study felt they had more to do to shift instructional practices to better serve and advocate for children in poverty and children from racially/ethnically backgrounds. The literature on closing the achievement gap for children in poverty calls educators to do more than provide material resources to low SES families (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Interview participants echoed previous studies that stated the importance of helping teachers to move beyond teaching content to

teaching social and organizational skills throughout their daily interactions with students (Milner, 2015; Jenson, 2009).   Descriptions provided by interview participants indicate that all three districts have systems emerging from cultural pre- competence to cultural competence on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

  Conclusion for research question 3. Educators trained in cultural proficiency concentrated first on creating a school environment where meeting the tangible needs of children and families living in poverty is a priority. In accordance with the descriptors of cultural pre -competence, (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010), creating an inclusive environment became a priority for educators trained in cultural proficiency, yet the participants in the three districts in this study indicate they need to continue to work on developing a school environment that embraces difference, and adjusts teaching practices and school policies to fully align with the characteristics of a culturally proficient system.

  Research Question 4: In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a culturally proficient system?

  Finding #10. All three district coordinators for professional development detailed their plan for providing additional professional development for teachers and administrators such that a mindset of culturally proficient practices becomes pervasive throughout each district. Although approached somewhat differently in each district, future plans for professional learning include studying impacts of poverty on learning,

understanding the role implicit bias plays in daily interactions with children and families and models of inclusion that better suit the needs of ELLs and special education students.

Cooper, He and Levin (2011) describe culturally competent educators as those who abandon the notion of color-blindness, embrace students' cultural difference and instead find ways to include native language and culture into daily teaching. In accordance with the cultural proficiency continuum, (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010), these three districts plan to continually provide professional development to reinforce asset- based- thinking and calls educators to highlight students' strengths rather than dwelling on cognitive, social, emotional or cultural deficits. It is important to note in this finding that all district and building leaders, along with teacher interview participants explained the level of sensitivity required when planning and implementing cultural proficiency professional development. Professional development that exposes implicit bias and tendencies toward racism, classism, ableism and other scenarios that can be defined as recognizing children as part of minority groups must be designed carefully so it brings about positive change and does not alienate educators.

As noted in prior research by CampbellJones, CampbellJones and Lindsey (2010), ten participants in this study emphasized that facilitated discussions requiring reflection and dialogue about race and associated difficulties related to race often brought up defensiveness among colleagues and among professional development participants. CampbellJones, CampbellJones and Lindsey (2010) agree that discussions about personal bias and systems of oppression are difficult to have because they often raise highly emotional discourse in response to feelings of guilt, anger, or one's personal feelings of oppression. Emotional responses also stem from those who finally feel a sense of

empowerment because they have a long-held belief that their school system was perpetuating oppression and this new professional development affirms their desire to act (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010).

Finding #11. In accordance with the Professional Learning Standards (Mizell, Hord, Killion & Hirsch, 2011) district coordinators of professional development in this study plan to continually plan future professional learning experiences with input from professional development teams and various stakeholders. All educators in this study pointed out that it is easier to discuss issues and assumptions associated with families in poverty and that teachers were more likely to welcome additional professional development about strategies to assist these children.

Finding #12. District coordinators for professional development in all three districts discussed the need to review policies and practices to assure access and equity for all children. Achieving cultural proficiency, according to Terrell and Lindsey (2009) requires districts to examine school policy from an equity lens. District coordinators of professional development, principals and teachers in this study discussed that these suburban districts were inconsistent in their approach to reviewing practices and policy from an equity lens.

Cora Creek CSD now uses an equity rubric, similar to criteria noted in Terrell and Lindsey's (2009) work, to review requests for materials requiring administrators to ask themselves whether these resources reflect diverse perspectives and languages and whether they provide an accurate portrayal of historical events for various cultural groups. Participants in one building in Kelly Rock CSD explained that they are reviewing homework and grading practices through an equity and access lens, yet review

of this kind is not occurring in a consistent manner among schools in that district or any of the districts noted. To fully achieve cultural proficiency according to the cultural proficiency continuum, review of policy from an equity lens should be a continuous process.

Conclusion for Research Question 4. These three districts are committed to providing ongoing professional development that includes understanding the impact poverty has on learning, the role implicit bias and a deficit viewpoint plays in developing relationships with children and families. The suburban districts in this study are committed to learning more about how to create an inclusive learning environment that addresses the needs of ELLs and special education students.

Recommendations for Policy

Recommendation #1. Suburban school districts should have a district professional development committee that is charged with designing ongoing professional development that will result in culturally proficient systems. To ensure this committee remains a standing district committee and carries out its charge, this researcher recommends that suburban districts be required to submit their plan for culturally proficient professional development as part their district professional development plan required under Section 100.2 (dd) of the Commissioner's regulations (NYSED, 2015).

The rationale for having a standing committee that oversees the design of culturally proficient professional development is twofold. First, this study supports the work of previous research (Kneebone, E., & Berube, A., 2013; Evans, 2007) that explains that demographics are changing in suburban districts and educators must recognize that school structures, traditions, policies, approaches to curriculum and overall school culture

have been based on an historically white middle-class population. It must be a priority for suburban teachers to understand their responsibility to educate all children, including those from minority groups and low-income families. Further, as noted in previous research (Ayscue, 2016; Frankenburg & Ayscue, 2013), the interview participants in this study stated that it is essential for educators to appreciate the impact cultural beliefs and social class has on the way a child learns and interacts in a school system and create a learning environment where all people views and learning needs are embraced.

Second, participants in this study spoke highly of work of their respective professional development committees charged with creating learning opportunities about teaching children in poverty or developing cultural competencies. Hord (2009) explains that the quality of teaching improves with continuous professional learning and the most powerful professional learning experiences occur with meaningful, standards- based, job embedded professional learning. Involving teachers in the planning and implementation process of professional learning will create a structure for much needed continuous feedback and also instill in teachers that continual learning is essential to meeting the needs of students as the population changes (Hord, 2009).

Recommendation #2. To obtain certification in New York State, pre-service teachers and administrators should be required to take coursework that includes study in developing cultural proficiency, reflecting upon implicit bias and deficit thinking, understanding the impacts of living in poverty and strategies for teaching ELLs. Universities offering teacher and administrator preparation programs should include such coursework as a requirement for graduation. This recommendation is in response to the information gained in this study and prior research that indicates that very few suburban

teachers have had coursework or professional development specifically dedicated to informing them in culturally proficient beliefs and practices (Ayscue, 2016; Frankenburg & Ayscue, 2013).

This evidence gleaned from the interview participants in this study supports New York State's newly revised requirements for certification renewal, now requiring teachers, teacher's assistants, and school leaders to receive training on how to better serve English Language Learners, specifically in co teaching strategies and integrating literacy skills into content areas (NYSED, 2016). In addition, to create a culturally proficient system, according to the continuum criteria (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010), this researcher recommends also requiring training in implicit bias, diversity and strategies to assist children and families in poverty. Teachers and administrators in this study reported that after participating in poverty simulations and diversity trainings that uncovered personal biases, their mindset and daily interactions with children changed.

Educators who participated in cultural proficiency training could articulate a change in mindset and practice they noticed in themselves and in colleagues whom had also participated. They also expressed frustration that not all educators in their districts were required to engage in professional learning designed to better serve ELLs, children living in poverty, and minority groups. In order to achieve the highest tier on the cultural proficiency continuum (CampbellJones, CampbellJones & Lindsey, 2010), this research further supports Cooper, Ye, and Levin's (2011) explanation that ongoing professional development should focus on developing an understanding of cultural beliefs and bring about reflection on daily interactions with children and families from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation #3. School districts need to take time to review district policy through a cultural proficiency lens and make changes to eliminate barriers and maintain advocacy for social justice (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). This calls district school boards and district leaders to articulate the importance of creating and maintaining a culturally proficient system in district goals. To do so requires examination of current policies that may overtly or unintentionally discriminate against or put up barriers for any student or family. For example, existing grading, homework and attendance policies may cause difficulties for underprivileged children. This study supports the work of CampbellJones, CampbellJones and Lindsey (2010) that remind educators and policy makers that the foundation of a culturally proficient system often requires dedication to "leveling the playing field so every cultural group can participate as colleagues, students, and/or members of the community" (p. 28).

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation #1. To achieve cultural proficiency, districts must provide ongoing professional development to shift educators' mindset to asset-based thinking while reviewing data, school practices traditions and policies from an equity and social justice lens (Appendix I). Creating and sustaining a culturally proficient system requires districts to focus professional development on: Recognizing White Middle -Class Norms of Suburban Schools, Understanding & Embracing Instructional Strategies to Assisting ELLs; Understanding & Supporting Children of Poverty; Reviewing Data from a Social Justice Lens; Developing School- Family Relationships Across Cultures and Income Levels.

Professional development opportunities should be delivered through a variety of structural formats, at varying times and be required of all staff. The districts in this study provided professional development in a number of ways. Educators in these districts attended trainings offered outside the district as well as those facilitated by internal experts. The formats ranged from large group, lecture style presentations, to small group discussion sessions. Some faculty reported working closely with colleagues informally and many expressed the importance of ongoing professional learning that occurred at faculty meetings. Previous research also indicates that when professional development is designed in this manner, educators benefit from taking a leadership role in identifying students' needs as well as their own needs as adult learners. Teacher leaders can then contribute to facilitating professional learning that results in increased student outcomes (Reeves, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Joyce & Showers, 2003).

Recommendation #2. When designing professional development, the implementation plan must include setting target outcomes and a system for measuring the desired outcomes. Although participants in this study provided anecdotal evidence about changes that took place resulting from attending professional development, a more comprehensive plan for reflection and feedback about its effectiveness is recommended. Mizell, Hord, Killion, & Hirsch (2011) emphasize that professional learning is valuable only if it increases educator effectiveness and increased student achievement. The Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process lends itself to evaluating implementation of culturally proficient practices. During pre- and post-observation conferences, administrators have opportunity to discuss and give feedback about methods used by teachers to fully learn about students' backgrounds, embrace personal histories,

build relationships with families and adjust instructional practices to meet the needs of all students.

Recommendation #3. This study recommends that suburban school districts provide resources for and establish systems that focus on establishing and maintaining positive relationships with families of all students. This recommendation is aligned with the research in other studies (Jensen, 2009; Howard, Dresser & Dunklee, 2009; Gorski, 2013) that state that developing relationships with students and their families is directly related to closing the achievement gap among children in poverty and minority students. This is essential in suburban schools given that, according to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) many families of minority students and low-income families feel uncomfortable in most suburban school cultures because they adhere to traditions, policies and daily activities that are more typical to a traditional white, middle class mindset. Interview participants in this study explained that they were more understanding of why some families didn't engage in traditional school events and made concerted efforts to form relationships with them.

Recommendation #4. Suburban schools should invest time in partnering with county agencies to more fully understand the resources available for children and families in poverty and non -native, English- speaking families. Kneebone and Berube (2013) explain that low income families in suburban communities, struggle with transportation issues because suburban communities are less likely to have access to public transportation. This results in difficulty accessing employment training opportunities and social services more readily accessible in more urban areas.

Suburban school districts should allocate funding to hire a district staff member who could serve as a liaison between public service agencies and families who need support. All three districts in this study agreed there was a need for more resources for struggling families and found ways to help families with creative solutions. Yet, the coordinator for professional development in Cora Creek CSD discussed the potential of forming partnerships between school districts and local and county agencies to better meet the needs of students and their families.

Recommendation #5. Districts should establish a structure for regular collaboration and combined efforts on developing culturally proficient systems. When asked about the kinds of professional development that would be most effective when trying to learn more about how to meet the needs of the changing suburban demographic, most participants noted the value in meeting with educators in other suburban districts to share resources and best practices. District coordinators of professional development described their difficulty in finding effective facilitators for diversity training in the upstate New York region and agreed that making the topic of cultural proficiency training a standing agenda item on their regional superintendents' meetings would be very useful. Partnering with local universities and community organizations have expertise in educating about social justice and examining systems from an equity perspective is also recommended. These experts can be a vital resource for review of policies, hiring practices and professional development offerings.

Recommendations for Future Study

Recommendation #1. The first recommendation for future study is to replicate this study but with a larger sample of educators selected randomly. Participants in this

study were selected by the coordinator for professional development and/or the building principal. Although not requested by the researcher, it became clear during the course of the interview process that principals and district coordinators tended to select participants whom had engaged in poverty simulations, differentiated instruction professional development or diversity trainings and/or were members of a professional development team focused on addressing the needs of low SES families or developing cultural proficiency. Participants included special education teachers, literacy and math coaches and an ESL teacher. The interview process revealed their natural inclination toward learning more about diversity, and understanding the needs of at risk students. A future study with random selection would give a clearer picture of the effectiveness of professional development and the barriers to achieving culturally proficient systems as articulated by those less inclined to learn about this topic.

Recommendation #2. The second recommendation for future study is to replicate this study but with a larger scale sample size. The qualitative study was valuable in that it allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and fully understand the participant's point of view regarding how to create a learning environment that values differences that children bring into the learning environment as well as glean the participant's perspective on approaches to delivering cultural proficiency professional development. However, this study is limited in that evidence was collected from only 17 interview participants from within the capital region of New York State. Broadening the study to include participants from several other suburban regions in New York State or in multiple states would give a much broader perspective on effective types of professional development and efforts to create a culturally proficient system.

Recommendation #3. The third recommendation for future study is to create a grounded theory comparative case study that examines culturally proficient professional development practices of urban schools and suburban schools. These findings would likely allow for comparison of descriptions of school environments, approaches to professional development and examination of district policies between districts with vastly different student demographics. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the school environment, this researcher suggests interviewing students and parents from diverse backgrounds, along with teachers and school leaders.   This study was limited in that it sought out only the perspectives of teachers and administrators whereas the insight of students and parents would add depth to the findings.

Recommendation #4. The fourth recommendation for future study is to design a quantitative study surveying teachers, leaders and coordinators of professional development about the types of culturally proficient professional development offered, their understanding of the characteristics of a culturally proficient school system and the qualities of a school environment that promotes assets- based thinking. This study would measure educators' understanding of the nature of cultural proficiency in schools.

Recommendation #5. The fifth recommendation for future study is to design a quantitative study that asks teachers and school leaders to take a survey prior to and after the completion of a series of cultural proficiency professional development workshops, each delivered using different learning strategies (ie. Lecture, discussion groups, scenario experiences, mixed approaches). This would give feedback on the quality of specific types of professional development as well as its effectiveness in changing practices to

create instructional strategies and learning environment that embraces and supports children from varying life experiences.

 Recommendation #6. The sixth recommendation for future study is to examine the demographic make-up of teachers and administrators currently working in suburban schools and review the efforts made through hiring practices to diversify the field of educators in suburban schools. Several participants in this study noted that there is a lack of diversity among the faculty in these suburban districts resulting in limited points of view, life experiences and opportunities for role models among people of color. This observation is consistent with prior research showing that the majority of educators in the United States are white and that diversifying the field of educators will help to overcome deficit thinking regarding diversity (Tefera, Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Chirichigno, 2011). Reviewing the diversity of staff members and each district's hiring practices was beyond the scope of this study, yet would provide useful information to suburban school districts.

Summary/Conclusion

 With the population of suburban communities and suburban schools growing more diverse, suburban school districts in this study provided teachers and administrators with professional development with the intention of overcoming deficit thinking and developing a school community that embraces diversity. Professional development was aimed at increasing educators' sensitivity and responsiveness toward English Language Learners, special education students, people of color and families living in poverty. The districts in this study adhered to several tenets of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning by partnering with teachers to develop job imbedded, ongoing

professional development offered in a variety of formats with internal and external expertise. To fully adhere to the standards for professional learning, these districts need to establish systems for measuring the impact these learning experiences had on instructional strategies and the school environment.

Educators in these suburban districts, trained in cultural proficiency, were dedicated to increasing the likelihood of school readiness by providing children clothing, food, school supplies, access to educational materials and transportation to school events. These schools also created opportunities to share and celebrate languages and traditions from various cultures. The participants in all three districts acknowledge that they have only begun the work of achieving a culturally proficient system and plan to continue to provide professional development that breaks down implicit bias, provides best practices for low SES students, special education students and ELLs.

CampbellJones, CampbellJones and Lindsey (2010) explain culturally proficient school systems are those that "honor the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit and engage all stakeholders with other cultures to close gaps in order to achieve equitable outcomes and social justice for every cultural group" (p.24). Based on this study, there is evidence to support that to achieve cultural proficiency, there is a need to require ongoing cultural proficiency professional development for all certificated educators and engage in ongoing dialogue among students and community members. Suburban schools must work to build positive relationships with all families helping to break down barriers that prevent full participation in the school community. Finally, achieving cultural proficiency is an ongoing process and districts must commit to continually reviewing policies and procedures to ensure access and equity for all children.

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Appendix A

Letter to Superintendent of Schools

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student at the Esteves School of Education at The Sage Colleges in Albany, New York. I am conducting a research study that is focused on how to more fully understand the needs and better serve students in poverty and the growing ethnically and racially diverse population in suburban schools in the Capital Region of New York State. My study is designed to examine the types of professional development offered to address these needs and how teachers and educational leaders are reviewing instructional practice, policies and programs when working with all students.
I am writing to request permission to conduct interviews with the member of your district administrative team who oversees planning for professional development, a high school and/or middle school principal, two middle and two high school teachers. These interviews will be conducted one-on-one and in person or by telephone and are expected to take 45 minutes.

I am also requesting that all interviews be recorded with the intention of having them professionally transcribed and participants will have opportunity to review the transcription documentation for accuracy. In addition, I am requesting access to documents related to professional development designed to address the needs of students in poverty and a diverse community of learners. All participant responses and documentation will be kept confidential and stored securely. The identity of your district and all participants will be referred to only by pseudonyms when reporting my findings. With your district's participation, it is my hope that this study will provide a deeper understanding of the efforts suburban districts are making to meet the needs of students in poverty and racially and ethnically diverse students. Research like this that explores the practices of suburban districts will make a constructive contribution to the field of education and benefit educational leaders, teachers, and students.

I look forward to talking with you about your district's participation in this study. If you have questions, please contact me at (518) 424-6518 or at jonese4@sage.edu or my Doctoral Advisor, Dr. Francesca Durand at duranf@sage.edu. Thank you for your consideration of supporting this research study.
Sincerely,

Eva L. Jones

Appendix B

SUPERINTENDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To: _____

You are being asked to allow employees from
_____School District to participate in a research project
entitled: The impact of Cultural Proficient Professional Development for teachers and
educational leaders on school environments and instructional practice.
This research is being conducted by : Eva Jones, Student Investigator

This qualitative study explores the role of professional learning in developing cultural
proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional practices
that are responsive to the needs of racially, ethnically and socio economically diverse
student groups. Participants in this study will include middle and high school teachers,
middle and/or high school principals, district office administrators who oversee
professional development in their district from 3 suburban districts in the Capital Region
of New York State.

Data will be collected through individual interviews with a district office administrator
who oversees professional development, a middle and/or high school teacher, two middle
school and two high school teachers. The researcher would also like permission to
collect and review associated documents. A separate set of interview questions will be
used for the district level administrators, the principals, and the teachers. The interview
protocol asks that interviewees sign a consent form noting their understanding that
although they will be asked to share their names and positions, all responses will be kept
confidential and pseudonyms will be used for participants and districts. Interviews will
be digitally audio recorded and transcribed by a qualified and confidential transcription
service. The researcher will also take notes during each interview. Additionally, the
researcher will review documents available on the district's website and those provided
by interview participants. If at any time participants would like to stop the interview
process or submission of documents, they may do so.

With your participation, this study will provide a deeper understanding of the efforts
suburban districts are making to meet the needs of students in poverty and racially and
ethnically diverse students. It is my hope that this study will make a constructive
contribution to the field of education and benefit educational leaders, teachers, and
students.

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this Agreement and to ask
questions concerning the study. Any such questions have been answered to my full and
complete satisfaction.

I, _____, having full capacity to consent, give my permission for the employees noted above to participate during or outside of their normal work hours.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

      Superintendent of Schools

This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you, as a participant, have any concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Francesca Durand at duranf@sage.edu and Dr. Donna Heald, PhD, Associate Provost, The Sage Colleges, 65 1st Street, Troy, New York 12180, 518-244-2326, healdd@sage.edu

Appendix C

Interview Protocol and Questions:
District Office Administrator (professional development coordinator or similar position)

Introduction:

Hello, I am Eva Jones from the Sage Colleges School of Education, and I am conducting a study about professional development to assist teachers and principals in meeting the needs of students of poverty and racially and ethnically diverse students.
Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed. This interview should take about 45 minutes.
Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:
1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____ **Date** _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.

2. What role, formal or informal, do you have in planning professional development activities for teachers and building leaders?
3. Have you noticed a change in the student population of this district in terms of racial/ethnic diversity and students in poverty?
4. Describe a school culture that embraces students from different socio economic or cultural backgrounds?
5. What resources do you consult and/or share with teachers and leaders about developing instructional strategies and attitudes to meet the needs of a diverse population?
6. Describe professional training, if any, you have provided to teachers and principals to help them understand more about the needs of students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students?

      a. Who provided it?

      b. Who participated?

      c. Duration?

      d. Was it in response to a particular event?

      e. Was there follow-up PD?

      f. Can you provide me with or refer me to documents related to this training and resulting activities?

7. In what ways, if any, have teachers adjusted their classroom environment, instructional practice and curriculum to better meet the needs of students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students?

8. Are you planning additional professional development training about developing cultural proficiency? If so, what and in what time frame?

      a. What outcomes do you hope to achieve with continued professional development?

9. What is the role of the building principal in creating a learning environment, instructional practices and policies that serve students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students?

10. Have you reviewed and/or adjusted policy, practices, curriculum, and programs as a result of cultural proficiency professional development?

11. Describe the obstacles, if any, faced by your district in regard to teaching students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students.

      a. And interacting with their families?

12. Are there other things you would like me to know about how you address the needs of all students?

Thank you for your participation in our interview today. I will be reviewing our interview in the next few weeks. After the interview recording is transcribed, I will invite you to review the typed transcript to check for accuracy. If you have any questions or concerns after our meeting today, please feel free to contact me by email at jonese4@sage.edu.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol and Questions for Teachers

Introduction:

Hello, I am Eva Jones from the Sage Colleges School of Education, and I am conducting a study about professional development to assist teachers and principals in meeting the needs of students of poverty and racially and ethnically diverse students.

Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about 45 minutes. Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is alright, too.

2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.

3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____ **Date** _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.
2. Have you noticed a change in the student population of this school in terms of racial/ethnic diversity and students in poverty?
3. What ways, if any, do you try to learn about students' cultural heritage or socio economic background?
4. What ways, if any, do you think that students' cultural or socio economic background influences how they learn.
5. Describe a school culture that embraces students from different socio economic or cultural backgrounds?
6. Describe the obstacles, if any, you may face when teaching students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students. And interacting with their families.
7. Have you had professional development on understanding the needs of students in poverty and or racially/ethnically diverse students? If yes, please describe:
    a. Who provided it?
    b. Who participated?

       c. Duration?

       d. Was it in response to a particular event?

       e. Was there follow-up PD?

       f. Can you provide me with or refer me to documents related to this training and resulting activities?

8. In what ways, if any, have you adjusted your classroom environment, instructional practice and curriculum to better meet the needs of students in poverty or racially/ethnically diverse students?

9. Describe the principal's role in helping you meet the needs of students in poverty or racially/ethnically diverse students.

10. Describe the district leaders' roles in helping you meet the needs of students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students.

11. Would you like to learn more about ways to better serve students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students? What types of professional development do you think would be most useful?

12. Have you or your school reviewed and/or adjusted policy, practices, curriculum, and programs to better serve all students and families?

13. Are there any other things that you would like me to know about how you address the needs of all students?

Thank you for your participation in our interview today. I will be reviewing our interview in the next few weeks. After the interview recording is transcribed, I will invite you to review the typed transcript to check for accuracy. If you have any questions or concerns after our meeting today, please feel free to contact me by email at jonese4@sage.edu.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol and Questions for Principals

Introduction:

Hello, I am Eva Jones from the Sage Colleges School of Education, and I am conducting a study about professional development to assist teachers and principals in meeting the needs of students of poverty and racially and ethnically diverse students. Thank you for taking time to help us with our study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed*. This interview should take about 45 minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. We would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that we do not tape record, that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant us permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas completed).

Interviewer: _____Date _____

District Interviewee(s) Name/Title: _____

1. Please state your position and how long you have served in this position.

2. Have you noticed a change in the student population of this school in terms of racial/ethnic diversity and students in poverty?

3. What ways, if any, do you try to learn about students' cultural heritage or socio economic background?

4. What ways, if any, do you think that students' cultural background or socio economic background influences how they learn?

5. Describe a school culture that embraces students from different socio economic or cultural backgrounds.

6. What role, formal or informal, do you have in planning professional development activities for teachers?

7. Have you and/or the teachers had professional training on understanding the needs of students of poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students? If yes, please describe:
   a. Who provided it?
   b. Who participated?
   c. Duration?
   d. Was it in response to a particular event?
   e. Was there follow-up professional development?
   f. Can you provide me with or refer me to documents related to this training and resulting activities?
8. In what ways, if any, have teachers adjusted their classroom environment, instructional practice and curriculum to better meet the needs of students in poverty or racially/ethnically diverse students?

9. What is the role of the building principal in creating a learning environment, instructional practices and policies that serve students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students?

10. What is the district leaders' roles in helping you meet the needs of students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students?

11. Have you reviewed and/or adjusted policy, practices, curriculum, and programs as a result of cultural proficiency professional development?

12. Describe the obstacles, if any, faced by your district in regard to teaching students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students.
    a. And interacting with their families.

13. Are you planning additional professional development about developing ways to better serve students in poverty and racially/ethnically diverse students? If so, what do you think would be most useful and in what time frame?
    a. What outcomes do you hope to achieve with continued professional development? How will you know if you have achieved them?

14. Are there other things you would like me to know about how you address the needs of all students?

Thank you for your participation in our interview today. I will be reviewing our interview in the next few weeks. After the interview recording is transcribed, I will invite you to review the typed transcript to check for accuracy. If you have any questions or concerns after our meeting today, please feel free to contact me by email at jonese4@sage.edu.

Appendix F

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To: _____

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled: The impact of Cultural Proficient Professional Development for teachers and educational leaders on school environments and instructional practice.

This research is being conducted by : Eva Jones, Student Investigator

       This qualitative study explores the role of professional learning in developing cultural proficiency among teachers and building leaders and its impact on instructional practices that are responsive to the needs of racially, ethnically and socio economically diverse student groups. Participants in this study will include middle and high school teachers, middle and/or high school principals, district office administrators who oversee professional development in their district from 3 suburban districts in the Capital Region of New York State.

Research Questions

       1. What is the nature of cultural proficiency professional learning experiences offered in the suburban districts studied?

       2. Are professional learning experiences about cultural proficiency for suburban teachers and principals in this study delivered in accordance with Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning?

       3. What types of learning environments do teachers and principals trained in cultural proficiency create for all students?

       4. In what ways are suburban districts in this study planning to further develop teacher and principal understanding and implementation of a cultural proficient system?

       Data will be collected through individual interviews and review of associated documents. A separate set of interview questions will be used for the district level administrators, the principals, and the teachers. The interview protocol asks that interviewees sign a consent form noting their understanding that although they will be asked to share their names and positions, all responses will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used for participants and districts. Interviews will be digitally audio recorded and transcribed by a qualified and confidential transcription service. The researcher will also take notes during each interview. Additionally, the researcher will review documents available on the district's website and those provided by interview participants. If at any time participants would like to stop the interview process or submission of documents, they may do so.

       With your participation, this study will provide a deeper understanding of the efforts suburban districts are making to meet the needs of students in poverty and racially and ethnically diverse students. It is my hope that this study will make a constructive contribution to the field of education and benefit educational leaders, teachers, and students.

For the purpose of data analysis only, the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist has signed a confidentiality agreement and will keep all information in password protected electronic files and in a locked box. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcription document for accuracy.

I give permission to the researcher to play the audio or video recording of me in the places described above. Put your initials here to indicate your permission. _____

Participation is voluntary, I understand that I may at any time during the course of this study revoke my consent and withdraw from the study without any penalty.

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this Agreement and to ask questions concerning the study. Any such questions have been answered to my full and complete satisfaction.

I, _____, having full capacity to consent, do hereby volunteer to participate in this research study

Signed: _____   Date: _____
      Research participant

This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you, as a participant, have any questions or complaints about this study, please contact Francesca Durand at duranf@sage.edu. and : Dr. Donna Heald, PhD, Associate Provost, The Sage Colleges, 65 1st Street, Troy, New York 12180, 518-244-2326, healdd@sage.edu

Appendix G

Confidentiality Agreement

Transcriptionist

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from (researcher's name) related to his/her research study on the researcher study titled (name of research study). Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, (name of researcher).

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to (researcher's name) in a complete and timely manner.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed)

_____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix H

List of Resources Used by Districts in this Study

Amanda Nickerson, PhD - Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention: http://gse.buffalo.edu/alberticenter

Captain Youth and Family Services - Education and services for those overcome adversity: https://captaincares.org/

CASDA- Professional Learning, Resources and Educational Services : https://www.casdany.org/

CAST – Universal Design for Learning (UDL): http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.WXIhCY5njSM

Caustin, Julie, EdD. – Inclusive Schooling: https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/

Dissard, J. M. & Peng, G. (2013). I Learn America - Documentary film: http://ilearnamerica.com/

Jensen, Eric (2009). *Teaching With Poverty in Mind*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD - and additional resources on understanding poverty: http://www.jensenlearning.com/news/category/teaching-with-poverty-in-mind

Payne, Ruby (2005). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty: A Cognitive Approach*. Highlands: Aha! Process

The Pride Center of the Capital Region - LGBT Community Center for Programs, Training & Education and Resources: https://www.capitalpridecenter.org/trainings-services/

Redford, J., (2015). *Paper Tigers: One School's Unlikely Success Story*. United States: KPJR Fims. - Documentary Film: http://kpjrfilms.co/paper-tigers/

Sources of Strength- Suicide prevention through peer led social networks: https://sourcesofstrength.org/

Teaching Tolerance: Diversity, Equity and Justice: http://www.tolerance.org/

Villa, Richard, EdD. - Inclusive Schools- National Professional Resources: https://www.nprinc.com/richard-villa/

Appendix I

Creating and Sustaining a Culturally Proficient System

To achieve cultural proficiency, districts must provide ongoing professional development to shift educators' mindset to asset – based thinking while reviewing data, school practices traditions and policies from an equity and social justice lens.

Essential Areas for Professional Learning: Entry Point Varies Depending on District Expertise and Needs

Recognize White Privilege, Middle Class Traditions and Color Blindness

Embrace Diversity and Culture

Understand & Embrace ELLs

Train educators on ENL instructional strategies

Utilize ENL teachers to lead PD/provide support

Appreciate & advocate for multi - cultural norms

Understand & Support Children in Poverty

Difficulties in School Readiness

Behavioral Patterns

Family Needs and Priorities

Review Data: Attendance, Achievement Gaps, Discipline Referrals, Suspension Rates, Enrollment in Honors/AP courses, Participation in Extra Curricular and Enrichment programs

Replace Deficit Thinking with Asset- Based Inclusion model for all children

Develop School -Family Relationships across all cultures and income levels.

Engage teachers, administrators, parents, students, teaching assistants, bus drivers, cafeteria workers and board members in these discussions.

Ongoing Professional Learning:

*Priorities are identified through review of data and established through partnership between teachers and leaders

*Implementation adheres to adult learning practices and change theory

*Effectiveness of professional development is measured according to its influence on shifting instruction and improving achievement outcomes.

Appendix J

November 28, 2016

Eva Jones
Doctoral Student, The Sage Colleges

IRB PROPOSAL #538-2016-2017   **Reviewer: Francesca Durand, Chair**

Dear Researchers:

The Institutional Review Board has renewed your application and has approved your project entitled " The impact of Cultural Proficient Professional Development for teachers and educational leaders on school environments and instructional practices" for one year. Good luck with your research.

Please refer to your IRB Proposal number whenever corresponding with us whether by mail or in person.

When you have completed collecting your data you will need to submit to the IRB Committee a final report indicating any problems you may have encountered regarding the treatment of human subjects. If the project goes longer than one year, please submit a continuation form

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Francesca Durand, PhD
Chair, IRB
FD/nan