

IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

by

BARBARA NELL SIMS

(Under the Direction of Karen Bryant)

ABSTRACT

Bridging the achievement gap has become a major focus for most school districts as one result of NCLB and high-stakes testing. New assessment accountability measures are forcing leaders to take a fresh look at standards-based leadership and accountability in the context of diverse schools. The need for multicultural training is no longer isolated within urban communities. Milner (2010) argues that it is critically important, particularly, for educators in urban, suburban, and rural environments to understand the “differences, complexities, and nuances” inherent in what it means to teach in these settings (Milner, 2012, p. 709). Culturally proficient teachers and leaders are needed to address twenty-first century students in our increasingly diverse and modern technological world: “Cultural proficiency is a model for shifting the culture of the school or district; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change” (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 4). Teacher preparation programs are not adequately preparing their pre-service students to understand changes in curricular approaches to diversity from the color-blind approach to multiculturalism. Meece and Wingate recommend that pre-service teachers need training in how to understand the anti-bias curriculum and its relationship to the current achievement gap.

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: “(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order” (p. 160). This action research case study examines the impact of cultural proficiency training on the beliefs, biases, and assumptions of elementary grade teachers. The theories used to frame this action research study include the Cultural Proficiency Theory and the Culturally Responsive Instruction Theory (CRI), undergirded by Mezirow’s Transformative Adult Learning Theory supported by the Social Capital Theory.

INDEX WORDS: Achievement Gap, Urban Communities, Cultural Proficiency, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

by

BARBARA NELL SIMS

B. A., University of Georgia, 1990

M. A., Piedmont College, 2001

Ed. S., Piedmont College, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2017

© 2017

BARBARA NELL SIMS

All Rights Reserved

IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

by

BARBARA NELL SIMS

Major Professor: Karen Bryant

Committee: Sheneka Williams
John Dayton

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
AUGUST 2017

DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my best friend Dr. Kanya Intim Cornish. There is an old saying that friends stick closer than a sister. I must say that this embodies my relationship with Kanya Intim Cornish. We are indeed closer than sisters. Three years ago, we embarked upon this arduous journey. On many occasions over the last three years, we have had to encourage one another to keep going and to not give up. It is especially poignant that we have endured, persevered, and completed our doctoral race together. Thanks, Kanya!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Karen Bryant and Dr. Sheneka Williams and Dr. John Dayton, who provided their time, effort, and insightful comments that helped shape this study. I would like to especially thank Dr. Karen Bryant, my major professor, for her patience, understanding, and guidance through this process. Your patience, understanding, and belief in me were priceless. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to get me to this point. I finally finished the race!

I would also like to recognize the members of my action research team. Thank you for graciously giving your time and dedication to the study. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow UGA classmates. Thank you for your never-ending support, laughs, and words of encouragement during our time together. You all have a special place in my heart!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Brookshire Elementary School	2
Conceptual Framework	4
Purpose and Research Questions	6
Problem Identification	7
Significance.....	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Assessment of Empirical Research.....	26
3 METHODOLOGY	40
Design of Study.....	41
Data Collection	47
Data Analysis	54
Trustworthiness of Data.....	55
Limitations of Study	58

	Researcher Subjectivity	58
4	CASE STUDY REPORT	60
	Context	60
	Story and Outcomes	61
	The Recruitment Process	62
	The Action Research Process Timeline	63
	Conclusion	70
5	FINDINGS	71
	How Are Cultural Differences Manifested?	72
	Impact of Professional Development on Cultural Proficiency	77
	An Action Research Team's Findings	79
	Summary	81
6	ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS	82
	Analysis.....	82
	Conclusions.....	84
	Implications.....	86
	Next Steps	87
	Summary	87
	REFERENCES	89

APPENDICES

A	RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT TEMPLATE.....	95
B	UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM.....	96
C	THEORY OF CHANGE.....	99
D	LOGIC MODEL.....	100

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: CRCT Reading 2013-2014	9
Table 2: Assessment Comparisons	10
Table 3: Key Empirical Findings	36
Table 4: Focus Group Participants.....	46
Table 5: Intervention Group Participants.....	46
Table 6: Ethnicity of Study Participants	50
Table 7: Research Plan Timeline	66
Table 8: Intervention Delivery Timeline	67
Table 9: Action Research Timeline	69
Table 10: Research Findings from Data	72
Table 11: Cultural Differences Findings.....	74
Table 12: Impacting Cultural Proficiency.....	78
Table 13: Impact of Cultural Proficiency Findings	79
Table 14: What Does an Action Research Team Learn?	80

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework	5
Figure 2: Visual Representation of Theoretical Framework.....	15
Figure 3: Spiral of Action Research Cycle	44
Figure 4: Data Analysis Process	54
Figure 5: The Action Research Approach	65

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Classrooms in the twenty-first century are increasingly more diverse. With this increased diversity, meeting individual student needs is a challenge for teachers and school leaders. School systems contend with issues of how to close the widening achievement gap. Based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education, school leaders are faced with a formidable task. Simultaneously, they are to lead our nation's schools in ways that provide equitable opportunities for all students irrespective of the students' cultural capital (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Many researchers debate whether we are experiencing an achievement gap within our nation's schools or an opportunity gap. Milner (2010) asserts that to accept the explanation for an 'achievement gap,' one must accept that there is a "biological basis for the superiority of Whites" (p. 4). The reality is that no race of people is biologically, genetically, or innately superior to other groups in terms of intelligence. Therefore, Milner (2010) argues that if educators agree with this reality, then they must also be willing to delve into the complex social maze of rationales for what are perceived as achievement gaps. According to research, opportunity gaps, especially those linked to diversity "exist at all levels in education, and in the lives of both educators and students" (Milner, 2010). It is no secret that high-poverty schools face persistent challenges that place student learning opportunities in jeopardy.

Brookshire Elementary School

As the focus of this action research case study, Brookshire Elementary School is a part of the Williams County School District located in the southeastern part of the United States. The system has 21 schools and more than 13, 633 students. Presently, the system consists of 14 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 3 high schools. The district's vision is for all students to graduate as life-long learners with the knowledge, skills, and character to succeed in the community and the global society. A widely diverse system nestled within a college town community, Brookshire Elementary, has 33 recorded languages spoken. Demographically, the district contains 21 percent white students, 49 percent black students, 24 percent Hispanic students, 2 percent Asian students, 4 percent multi-racial students, and less than one percent American Indian and Pacific Islander students. A recently acquired system grant enabled 100 percent of the student population to qualify for free lunches.

Simons (2009) encourages the use of biographical data, such as personal history details in case study research. By including these key features, my attempt was to help the readers see how these details may influence this case study. One of fourteen elementary schools, Brookshire Elementary School is a suburban neighborhood school that is in the economically, distressed, northern quadrant of Williams County. Clustered in the center of an economically disadvantaged community, the school's mission is to prepare students to be productive members of society by providing a challenging and meaningful education. When the school opened in 2011, the system goal was not to open

just another “new” school, but to design a structure that would inspire teaching and learning. The principal and assistant principal reinforce daily the school vision Statement: “Rigor, Relevance, Relationships— Every Day, Every Classroom, and Every Child,” which is proudly displayed on the lobby walls. Artistically and aesthetically, Brookshire is an impressive structure. The custodial team works tirelessly to keep the building clean. Upon entering the building, one is greeted by a large hand painted mural representation of culturally diverse children. Two large, green, thriving, ferns stand elegantly at each side of the second set of doors to the building. Additional intriguing aspects of the facility are the three wings (Earth, Solar System and Ocean), which are the themes for each grade level hall. Visitors, parents, and community members feel the sense of mission that permeates every corner of the school.

Every feature of Brookshire Elementary school fosters a love of knowledge and imagination. A mini outdoor theatre space and a large cistern which collects rainwater to be used in classroom gardens can be seen behind the school. Parents and stakeholders frequently comment on the native tracks of animals in the concrete walkway outside the building. Approximately, 433 students ranging from pre-k age to grade 5 can be seen in uniforms of red, white, and blue walking in quiet lines throughout the building.

Throughout the school day, children can be seen and heard enjoying one of the two large playgrounds located on the backside of the school building. Approximately 40 teachers serve the 47% African-American, 45% Hispanic, 5% White, and 3% Multi-racial students’ population. Of the 40 certified teachers employed at Brookshire, 24 of the 40 have advanced degrees. Twelve years is the average years of teacher experience.

Brookshire Elementary School follows the Professional Development School District

(PDSD) model, which began with the opening of West Side Elementary Charter School in 2009. The faculty and staff at Brookshire Elementary work in partnership with Dr. Sue Brown, a faculty member in the department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of West Alabama. Dr. Brown serves as the professor-in-residence at Brookshire Elementary where she teaches Early Childhood courses. On any given day, pre-service teachers can be seen throughout the building performing various tasks. Most classroom teachers have 2 pre-service teacher candidates assisting with small group and individual instruction twice a week. Multiple Block 4 student teacher candidates work daily alongside certificated staff. One of Brookshire's school improvement goals is to look for ways to address the increasing disproportionality in reading scores between its two minority student subgroups.

This study was designed to explore ways to help Brookshire Elementary teachers understand how the factors listed in the diversity and opportunity gap framework impact teaching and learning. Finally, this study was designed in the hopes that it would help bring awareness to and allow examination of how social context shapes opportunity rather than focusing primarily on the students themselves or on achievement gaps and outcomes such as test scores.

Conceptual Framework

According to Maxwell (2005) a conceptual framework is defined as a visual or written product of how the researcher envisions the problem that is being studied. To support the theory that culturally proficient teachers are more successful working with diverse learners, I chose to use the Explanatory Opportunity Gap Framework developed by Milner (2010) as my conceptual framework (see Figure 1). Milner's (2010) Diversity and Opportunity Gaps framework covers five interconnected areas: (1) "rejection of

colorblindness; (2) ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend cultural conflicts; (3) ability to understand how meritocracy operates; (4) ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mind-sets; and (5) rejection of context-neutral mind-sets and practices” (p. 14). According to Milner (2010), it is critical that educators understand how the factors listed in the diversity and opportunity gap framework impact teaching and learning.

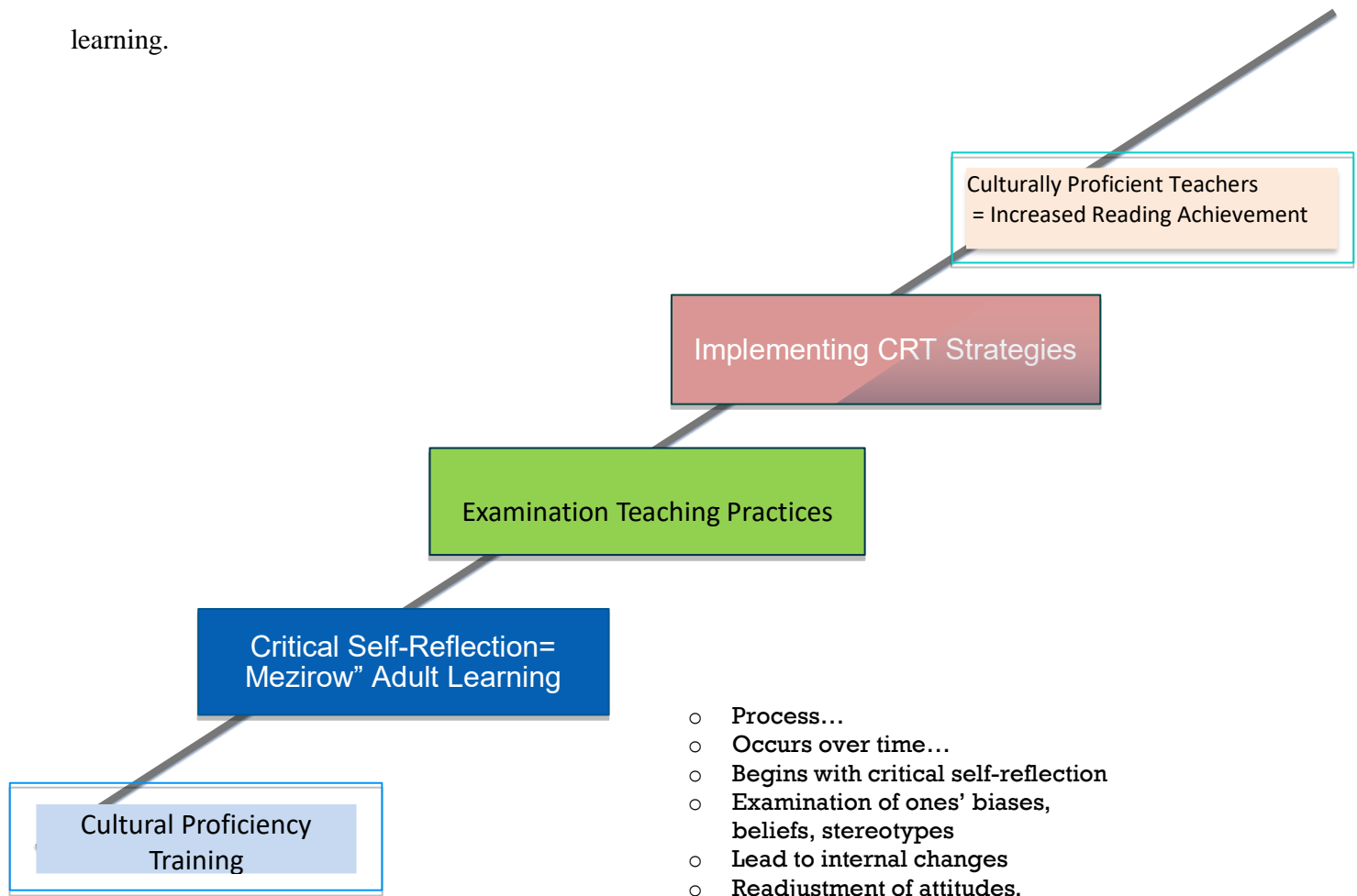


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

This action research study provided opportunity for teachers to gain an understanding of the impact that culture, beliefs, perceptions, and biases have on student achievement. Teachers could obtain a working definition of cultural competence and

begin to explore how their personal biases, perceptions, and beliefs impacted their interaction with African-American and Hispanic learners within their individual classrooms.

Purpose and Research Questions

Despite being a Title I Distinguished School, meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three consecutive years and being a Professional Development School of Distinction (PDSD), Brookshire Elementary School continues to have a disproportionate number of African-American students who, despite receiving daily additional reading supports through an Early Intervention Program (EIP), are still scoring below their Hispanic peers on standardized assessments in Reading.

Fortunately, Brookshire Elementary could retain a full-time instructional coach who facilitated and supported the data team implementation process at both the school and district level. At the school level, the Instructional coach met monthly with grade level teams, the administration team and team leaders to discuss trends and patterns appearing within the school data. In addition, as another one of her assigned duties, the Instructional coach worked with grade level teams to target and plan for academic areas in need of intervention. Being afforded the opportunity to work closely with the Instructional coach provided invaluable insight that aided me as my action research unfolded at Brookshire Elementary.

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to explore whether cultural proficiency training impacts teacher attitude, perceptions, and beliefs about the learning abilities of Hispanic and African-American students in a historically suburban

community school setting. The questions guiding this case study action research project are as follows:

1. How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school?
2. How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency?
3. What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction?

Problem Identification

Transformational change is needed in the core of education; more specifically, in the classroom. Educational researchers have attempted for years to shed light on the relationships between teaching and learning and leadership and learning. Both relationships are necessary ingredients to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. History has shown that school systems across the country have seldom treated students in an equitable manner.

Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) suggest that the gap in achievement between white students and minority students is the result from years of uneven access to education on the part of minorities. These disparities, as pointed out by Johnson and Bush (2005), reveal the need for students to have access to teachers who are effective at increasing academic achievement, regardless of the students' ethnicity or economic status (p. 273). According to Johnson and Bush (2005), teacher content knowledge alone does not meet the needs of diverse learners (p. 273). In addition, Milner (2010) points out that it is critically important, particularly, for educators in urban, suburban, and rural

environments to understand the “differences, complexities, and nuances” inherent in what it means to teach in these settings (Milner, 2012, p. 709). “Relevant, effective and responsive teaching” requires that educators know more than their subject matter (Milner, 2012, p. 709). Furthermore, “as students at our nation’s schools become increasingly diverse, it is becoming more difficult for teachers to teach them and for teacher education programs whether traditional or nontraditional to prepare them to teach” (Milner, 2010, p. 5). Culturally proficient teachers and leaders are needed to address twenty-first century students in our increasingly diverse and modern technological world.

“Cultural proficiency is a model for shifting the culture of the school or district; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change” (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 4). Researchers who studied differences between students from the dominant culture and predominately students of color conclude that all students can learn well, if they are taught well. Increased diversity within our nation’s schools, the current era of mandated assessment and accountability, an influx of culturally as well as linguistically-challenged students, and a teaching force comprised mostly from the dominant culture have presented a need to reevaluate how reading instruction is being delivered (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Despite being a Title I Distinguished School, meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three consecutive years and being a Professional Development School of Distinction (PDSD), Brookshire Elementary School has a disproportionate number of African-American students who, despite receiving daily additional reading supports through an Early Intervention Program (EIP), are still scoring below their Hispanic peers on standardized assessments in Reading (see Table 1).

Subgroups	Meets/Exceeds	Exceeds Only	Does Not Meet
African American	88.1%	17.9%	11.9%
Caucasian	81.8%	0.0%	18.2%
Hispanic	97.4%	32.9%	2.6%
<i>Source: Georgia Gov.</i>			

Table 1
CRCT Reading 2013-2014

According to the 2014 CCRPI report, Brookshire Elementary had 88.8% of students meeting or exceeding in ELA, 92.4% meeting and exceeding in Reading, 84.1% meeting or exceeding in math, 78.8% meeting or exceeding in Science, and 68.8% of their student population meeting and exceeding in Social Studies (see Table 2). Data indicate that the systematic school-wide focus on providing quality direct attention for the Hispanic students at Brookshire Elementary has definitely increased achievement as shown in the table below; however, achievement data show minimal difference in the achievement scores for Brookshire's African-American students despite the additional reading support that these students received through the EIP program as well as the additional support provided by Dr. Sue Brown's pre-service teacher candidates. Most of Brookshire's students falling below the targeted grade 3 Lexile band of 650 are African-American. Data indicate that Brookshire has a significant population of students failing in reading.

This action research study provided me the opportunity to examine the effects of cultural proficiency professional development upon teacher perceptions, biases, and attitude with regards to minority students' achievement.

	2012	2013	2014
Meets/Exceeds ELA	87%	85%	88.8%
Meets/Exceeds in Reading	89%	92.1%	92.4%
EL increased performance	72.3%	67.2%	81.5%
Grade Lexile > 650	31.6%	39.6%	53.4%
<i>Source: Georgia Gov.</i>			

Table 2
Assessment Comparisons

Significance

This study has a direct impact on the educational leaders at Brookshire Elementary and throughout the Williams County School District. Increasing diversity within today's classrooms has erected formidable barriers, and made teaching students a challenge for teachers and school leaders; many school systems contend with issues of how to close the widening achievement gap and provide equitable opportunities for all students irrespective of the students' cultural capital (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

According to Meece and Wingate (2010), high quality teaching is an essential element in providing children with support, feedback, and positive communication. Teacher preparation programs are not adequately preparing their pre-service students to understand changes in curricular approaches to diversity from the color-blind approach to multiculturalism. Meece and Wingate recommend that pre-service teachers need training

in how to understand the anti-bias curriculum and its relationship to the current achievement gap. This study shows a direct relationship between participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies and increased teachers' cultural proficiency. Culturally proficient teachers are better equipped to handle twenty first century learners.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Milner (2010) asserts that, “as students at our nation’s schools become increasingly diverse, it is becoming more difficult for teachers to teach them and for teacher education programs whether traditional or nontraditional to prepare them to teach” (p. 5). Diversity is multi-dimensional and is not limited to race (Milner, 2010). According to Milner (2010), the teacher’s understanding of diversity as it relates to opportunity is the key to cultivating and presenting learning opportunities within the curriculum that can be made available for diverse learners. The harsh reality is that diversity and equity are historically contentious topics. History has shown that school systems across the country have seldom treated students in an equitable manner.

Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) suggest that the gap in achievement between white students and minority students is the result from years of uneven access to education on the part of minorities. These disparities, as pointed out by Johnson and Bush (2005), reveal the need for students to have access to teachers who are effective at increasing academic achievement, regardless of the students’ ethnicity or economic status (p. 273). According to Johnson and Bush (2005), teacher content knowledge alone does not meet the needs of diverse learners (p. 273). Culturally proficient teachers and leaders are needed to address twenty-first century students in our increasingly diverse and modern technological world. “Cultural proficiency is a model for shifting the culture of the

school or district; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change” (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 4). Learning from the past is essential to unlocking the future. Leaders must understand fully the evolution of policy as it relates to issues of diversity and the issues which lead to these policy shifts must be fully understood before they can train culturally proficient teachers (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). According to Ghosh (2014), the word ‘culture’ is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The word ‘proficient’ is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively (Cross et al., 1989, p. 13). Each decade has created new social policies in response to issues of equity and diversity. Before the 1950s, segregation of cultural and racial groups was the norm. In many parts of the Southern United States, legal forms of segregation included slavery. Jim Crow Laws defined racial groups and mandated separation of those groups in public places. After the 1950s, the fall-out from the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision, which ended segregation in public facilities, added another dimension to the issues of diversity and race. Since the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954, educational leaders have tiptoed around how best to serve the needs of our nation of diverse learners (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). The 1960s brought about integration; the shift from desegregation to integration was monumental and had a pivotal impact upon the school systems.

Out of the push for desegregation came Title 1 of the Secondary Education Act and the Emergency Assistance Act. These programs were designed to provide the same opportunities for children of color that were afforded white children. An unintended

consequence from this entitlement program was minority labeling or stereotyping. The programs were viewed as programs for the culturally and economically disadvantaged. As a result, many minorities continued to receive a sub-standard education.

The 1970s ushered in equal benefits and multiculturalism, and “multiculturalism represented a departure from the assimilationist or melting pot model” (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Educators began to question whether multiculturalism should not be the lens through which to view every culture. Women’s rights, gay men, and lesbian issues entered the discussion during this period. Corporate America discovered during the 1980s that diversity awareness was good for business. Many companies offered “diversity training” for their managers and employees. Diversity was no longer considered solely from the perspective of racial differences. Now other identifiers such as age, gender, sexual orientation was also being considered (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Cultural proficiency became the new term that emerged during the 1990s and the 21st century. Researchers who studied differences between students from the dominant culture and predominately students of color conclude that all students can learn well, if they are taught well. Yu (2012) reports that only one in nine Whites believe racial discrimination against Blacks is still a serious problem, if at all. Yu (2012) further asserts that race talk and relations under the helm of President Obama’s leadership have worsened, and that White denial is just a continuation of a disastrous historical pattern.

Theoretical Framework

The theories used to frame this action research study include the Cultural Proficiency Theory and the Culturally Responsive Instruction Theory (CRI), undergirded

by Mezirow's Transformative Adult Learning Theory along with the Social Capital Theory.



Figure 2. Visual Representation of Theoretical Framework

These theories indicate that when teachers of diverse learners develop and maintain cultural relevant pedagogy (CRP), which according to Gay (2000) are those ideals and beliefs that “teach to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students,” that these students will be successful in the learning environment. As applied to my qualitative action research case study, these theories hold an expectation that diverse students with culturally proficient teachers implementing culturally responsive instruction (CRT) will experience academic success, and perform comparably with their Hispanic peers in reading. This is because culturally proficient teachers acknowledge the home-community cultures of their students, are sensitive to cultural nuances, and integrate these cultural experiences, values, and understandings into the teaching and learning environment. According to Mezirow (1997), we transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based. The goal of learning is to become an autonomous, responsible thinker who is then able to think critically and independent of other points of view and beliefs. Learners need assistance to be able to participate

effectively in discourse. Mezirow's theory of transformational learning aligns closely with the stages within which one moves toward becoming culturally proficient. This theory is based heavily on the learner's ability to be self-reflective and critically evaluate one's biases, beliefs, and assumptions. Being privy to the stages of awareness through which each teacher progressed was validation and support of the Mezirow's Transformational Adult Learning Theory.

Cultural Proficiency and Cultural Competence

According to Brown-Jeffy and Copper (2011), *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966) by Coleman and colleagues was the first major post-*Brown v. Board of Education* study to establish that the achievement of Black children was lower than that of White children. This racial gap in achievement has been documented as early as kindergarten and first grade, and continues to grow as students matriculate through the public-school system (Coleman et al., 1966; Entwisle & Alexander, 1992, 1994; Lee & Burkham, 2002; Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). While the social construction of race is a complex factor that permeates the fabric of the American lived experiences, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) does not explicitly problematize race. Baldwin (2015) asserts in an article that "most teachers are insecure or feel inferior because they lack the necessary tools needed to relate to students from cultures different than their own" (p. 98). Goldenberg (2014) brings a different perspective to the discussion of cultural competence. He asserts that the achievement gap is not necessarily the issue in schools; rather, what have occurred over time are opportunity gaps that exist between students of color and their white counter-parts. A lack of cultural understanding between teacher and student hinders students' overall learning

(Goldenberg, 2014). Furthermore, the differences between the dominant culture [white middle class] and the non-dominant culture greatly impact student achievement (Goldenberg, 2014). Goldenberg further asserts in other literatures that non-White students' lack of possession of cultural capital affects the pedagogical practices of White teachers. According to Goldenberg (2014), the following strategies are needed to help White teachers better engage with their students of color: The first suggestion is that teachers must realize, through self-reflection, that being White must be acknowledged. Secondly, teachers need to recognize students' non-dominant culture in the classroom as culture and not as resistance to learning; finally, teachers must embrace students' non-dominant culture pedagogically in the classroom and believe that it can successfully be done (Goldenberg, 2014). This is by no means an easy task. "One of the most painful parts of the critical reflection process for many White Americans is acknowledging and recognizing their unearned privilege, opportunity, and advantage" (Howard, 2010, p. 119). Howard (2010) suggests that perhaps one of the most important aspects of becoming culturally competent is self-reflection.

Cultural proficiency is defined as the capacity of educators from different backgrounds and cultures to effectively interact (Gay, 2000; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). In the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices, there is often disconnection between articulated commitments and actual practices (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). At its core, culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on high academic expectations for student success (Gay, 2000; Ladson- Billings, 1994, 2005, 2006). High academic expectations are often lacking in the conversation about cultural proficiency, but it is the critical foundation of the theory (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). Mugisha

(2013) views this issue from a conceptual perspective based on effective schools' research (ESR) (Brookover et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1997; Lezotte & McKee, 2006) and confirmed in the early 1980s that schools with strong instructional leadership could make a tangible difference in the academic lives of students at risk of scholastic failure such as minority-culture and socio-economically disadvantaged students (Sorenson, Goldsmith, Méndez, & Maxwell, 2011).

Thompson and Byrnes (2011) contend that culturally competent teachers introduce new values and beliefs into the classroom and make a difference in the friendship networks that form in a classroom. Teachers who are sensitized to cultural differences positively impact student thinking, feeling, and a change in behavior (Thompson & Byrnes, 2011). Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Multicultural theorists such as Banks (2006), Bell (1997), and Bennett (1999) postulate that what is needed in our schools is a socially just climate that facilitates opportunities for all students to have equitable access to a quality education in a safe and inclusive setting (Thompson & Byrnes, 2011). Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) believe that cultural proficient leadership is required to transform our increasingly diverse schools. Howard (2001) framed his argument in the context of the two theoretical perspectives with culturally relevant pedagogy being the first. Ladson-Billings (1995) specifically defined culturally relevant pedagogy as: "pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (p. 160). Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: "(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must

develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order” (p. 160). Before Ladson-Billings (1995) coined culturally relevant pedagogy, several authors discussed the concept. Au and Jordan (1981) maintained that knowing the difference between school learning and informal learning is important in facilitating academic success for students. Specifically related to CRP, they asserted: “The context of school learning is often different from that of informal learning and often unrelated to the child’s culture” (Au & Jordan, 1981, pp. 149-150). Similarly, Au and Jordan (1981) emphasized that by “bringing the relevance of the text to the child’s own experience helps the child make sense of the world” (pp. 149-150). Socialization is a key factor in how students receive, analyze, and interpret information (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981). The phrase culturally relevant teaching is used to describe the pedagogy of successful teachers of African-American and other minority students (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Leggett, 1981). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the concept of culturally relevant teaching is an attempt to create a schooling experience that enables students to stay on track academically without abandoning their cultural integrity. Sleeter (2011) provides a different perspective from which to consider cultural proficiency. According to Sleeter (2011), culturally responsive pedagogy is a social justice work and is political. Howard (2010) concurs and adds to the conversation by reminding us of earlier research conducted by Bonilla-Silva in 2003. He too was of the mind that “Whiteness is a “social structure within a racialized school system that awards systemic privileges to Europeans” (p. 121). Sleeter (2011) advocates that “culturally responsive, multicultural, and bilingual approaches to teaching have largely been replaced by standardized curricula and

pedagogy, rooted in a political shift toward neoliberalism that has pushed business models of school reform” (p. 7). The author makes an alarming claim that culture and racism are reversing the empowered learning that culturally responsive pedagogy supports (Sleeter, 2011). Research on cultural proficiency is numerous; however, “far too little systematically documents its impact on student learning” (Sleeter, 2011, p. 16). Even less research addresses the gaps in achievement within African-American and Hispanic learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Increased diversity within our nation’s schools, the current era of mandated assessment and accountability, an influx of culturally as well as linguistically-challenged students, and a teaching force comprised mostly from the dominant culture have presented a need to reevaluate how reading instruction is being delivered (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Delpit (1995) asserts that much of education today has been exchanged for meaningless tasks that have no influence on students’ classroom achievement. Furthermore, “we as educators, due to our fear of accountability, are exiting students in droves from our doors who have uninformed character and unchallenged minds” (Delpit, 1995, p. 18). According to Schmeichel (2012), the dissemination of good teaching practices is the key to closing the achievement gap and to improving the educational experiences of children of color. Culturally relevant pedagogy is just an example of “good teaching” and should be promoted to improve the achievement of all students (Schmeichel, 2012). Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the segregation of the United States school system insured that, for the most part, the cultural issues relevant to the education of African-American students were only of marginal interest to white

educators (Schmeichel, 2012). After *Brown*, and its mandate to integrate schools, greater attention was paid to the culture of children of color in mainstream publications. Culturally responsive teachers “teach to and through the strengths of students” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). According to Hawley and Nieto (2010), race and ethnicity affect how students respond to instruction and their opportunities to learn; race and ethnicity influence teaching and learning in the following ways: they affect how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and they influence teachers’ assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning. Not all educators believe that minority students are capable of learning to the degree of their White counter-parts. According to Howard (2001) successfully teaching diverse students, is possible if “White teachers develop a healthy White racial identity which challenges White privilege and the systemic oppression of racial minorities under White domination” (p. 47). Learning to teach varied cultures is within reach and can be acquired through pre-service and in-service professional learning opportunities.

Professional Learning

According to Meece and Wingate (2010), high quality teaching is an essential element in providing children with support, feedback, and positive communication. The authors further attest that teacher quality is closely associated with closing the achievement gap between minority children. Teacher preparation programs are not adequately preparing their pre-service students to understand changes in curricular approaches to diversity from the color-blind approach to multiculturalism. Meece and Wingate recommend that pre-service teachers need training in how to understand the anti-bias curriculum and its relationship to the current achievement gap. Accordingly,

Prater, Wilder, and Dyches (2008) assert that teacher educators would benefit from comprehensive professional development in cultural and linguistic diversity (as cited by Sobel et al., 2011). Wiggins and McTighe (2006) maintain that professional development holds the greatest promise to improve standard practice and professionalism among all educators (as cited by Sobel et al., 2011). According to Meece and Wingate (2010), “teachers must be able to understand differences between children from different cultural groups without developing pedagogy of poverty that may result in lowered expectations of children from minority and low-income families” (p. 36). Furthermore, one of the challenges encountered in the implementation of Anti-Bias Curriculum has been helping students to recognize that although “statistical differences do exist in the achievement of black and white children, we [educators] must not lower our expectations for children based on a child’s race or socioeconomic status” (p. 38). According to King, Artiles, and Kozleski (2009), professional learning for culturally responsive teaching has the potential to address achievement gaps across ethnic groups as well as the disproportionate representation in special education for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Our nation has never been more ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse than it is today (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009). Consequently, the need for culturally proficient teachers and leaders to understand how to implement culturally responsive instruction has become perilous (King et al., 2009). The Equity Alliance at ASU has generated a set of principles to guide culturally responsive professional learning. The principles were influenced by research conducted by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) with teacher learning communities around the nation (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

The professional learning principles held by the Equity Alliance at ASU's professional learning are focused on improving learning within culturally diverse communities. Furthermore, engaging educators in professional learning through discourse and inquiry are their guiding principles. The Equity Alliance views professional learning as a facet of daily living not simply a compartmentalized activity (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Perhaps, the most essential principle held by the Equity Alliance is that professional learning results in improved learning for marginalized students within the U.S. public school system. According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), professional learning influences decisions about what is taught; it increases educators' knowledge which leads to sustainable educational communities (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Finally, professional learning, when delivered well, is particularly beneficial for students who are members of cultural and linguistic minorities.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning is closely aligned with Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell's (2009) theory of cultural proficiency. According to Mezirow (1997), as adults we have an "acquired coherent body of experiences—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define how we view the world" (p. 5). According to Christie, Carey, Robertson, and Grainger (2015), the goal of transformative learning is to help individuals challenge the current assumptions on which they act, and, if they see a need for change, to change them. This includes a mental shift as well as a behavioral one. An expectation of transformative learning is that better individuals will build an improved world. Mezirow (1997) further explains that as adults we view the world through frames of references

such as habits of mind and points of views. Mezirow (1997) defines habits of mind as “broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking and feeling” (p. 6). Points of view are defined as the “feelings, beliefs, judgments, and attitudes that we have regarding specific individuals or groups” (p. 6). Homosexuals, welfare recipient, people of color, and women are judged through these frames of references (Mezirow, 1997).

Additionally, Mezirow (1997) argues that transformational learning occurs through communication. He further asserts that communicative learning also “involves an understanding of one’s purpose, values, beliefs, and feelings” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6).

In communicative learning, it becomes “essential for learners to become critically reflective of their assumptions and underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6). According to Mezirow (1997), we transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based. Mezirow (1997) cautions leaders to be aware that for transformational learning to occur, learners [teachers] must be provided learning opportunities so that they may become aware and critical of their own and others’ assumptions.

Therefore, it should be the focus of educational leaders to facilitate transformational learning within their schools. It is essential that teachers be given time to practice recognizing frames of reference and using their imaginations to redefine problems from different perspectives. Finally, pre-service teachers likewise need developmental assistance to participate effectively in discourse. Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning aligns closely with the stages within which one moves toward becoming culturally proficient. Likewise, the cultural proficiency theory also is based

heavily upon the learner's ability to reach a stage in development where they can be self-reflective and able to critically evaluate their own biases, beliefs, and assumptions.

Social Capital Theory

Optimal opportunity in America has been an elusive commodity for many members of minority groups. Achieving the American dream has been difficult and frequently unattainable for many African-American and Hispanic families. Unfair access to capital has arrested the accessible resources. Over the past decades, many minorities have been disenfranchised due to an unequal distribution of these resources. According to Mahmood (2015), there are various forms of capital operating within society, "these mainly include intellectual capital, environmental capital, cultural capital and social capital" (p. 114). The concept of 'social capital' "has attracted quite an extensive intellectual discussion" in the last few decades (Mahmood, 2015, p.114). The theory of social capital has been widely debated and has gained the attention of many researchers of social science (Mahmood, 2015). Research shows that there are varied definitions and applications for the theory of social capital (Dika & Singh, 2002). Several researchers argue that "social capital is the bond that links societies together and without which there would be little opportunity for economic growth or individual well-being" (Vera-Toscano, Garrido-Fernández, Gómez-Limón, & Cañadas-Reche, 2013, p. 1332). Bourdieu (1992) holds that the concept of social capital is integral to a principle of social assets and that people obtain a very unequal return on equivalent capital. Wacquant (1992) concurs with Bourdieu (1992) that social capital is "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances" (p. 119).

Coleman defines social capital within an educational context. Social capital, according to Coleman (1988) is “the set of resources that inherent in family relations and in community social organizations and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person” (Coleman, 1990, p. 300). Stanton-Salazar’s (2011) definition of social capital is based upon the works of Coleman and Bourdieu and was the definition that helped guide my qualitative action research case study.

According to Stanton-Salazar (2011), social capital “consist of resources and key forms of social support embedded in one’s network or associations which are accessible through direct or indirect ties with institutional agents” (p.1067). Minorities have been at a disadvantage because they operate within two cultural worlds: the dominant culture and the White middle class or Anglo-Saxon culture. Stanton-Salazar (1997) argues that minorities often experience a divide because each culture has a different set of norms, values, ideals, beliefs, and dialogues (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Furthermore, many theorize that classical models of early civilization “delineated a process by which children and youth come to internalize, identify with, and conform to the norms, values, and ideals, of American society” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 2). The social capital theory is constructed on the premises that in the absence of social capital minorities who are unable to maneuver the current societal bridges and barriers within schools tend to fall through the cracks and are frequently viewed by teachers as not capable of learning.

Assessment of Empirical Research

Research clearly shows that culturally proficient teachers and leaders can positively impact minority students’ behaviors and academic achievement. A critical issue in teacher education today is a mismatch between racially homogenous teachers and

students from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds (Ukpokodu, 2004). As the United States' student population diversifies exponentially, current data on the teaching force reveals little change with pre-service teachers (Ukpokodu, 2004). Future predictions for the next decade of teachers are that they will be predominantly white, middle class, monolingual, female, rural and suburban (Ukpokodu, 2004). The impact of this disparity in the socio-cultural mismatch between diverse students and their white middle class teachers has been well documented to include lowered teacher expectation and teachers' racialized and ill-perceived attitudes towards, and beliefs about certain students (Ukpokodu, 2004). Studies conducted in 2004 indicated that compatibility between school culture and student culture facilitates effective communication and positive interactions between teacher and pupil (Ukpokodu, 2004). Numerous studies have similarly shown that a majority of white pre-service teachers have negative and racialized dispositions toward diverse students, and these attitudes coupled with the attendant lower expectations are major factors contributing to the widespread academic failure among diverse students (Ukpokodu, 2004). Therefore, researchers and scholars have challenged teacher education programs to provide prospective teachers with hands-on opportunities for authentic experiential encounters with contextualized diversity where they can be challenged to confront their preconceived notions and biases. A recent study conducted by Ukpokodu (2004) was in direct response to this very challenge. Pre-service teachers were asked to shadow students who were culturally different from themselves, and to reflect upon how the experience changed their preconceptions about these students' race and ethnicity. The participants were also asked to keep written reflective journals of their experiences. Perhaps, the most compelling piece of evidence

in support of the need for cultural awareness was the pre-service teachers' journal reflections of their own experiences. In this study, the pre-service teachers described, analyzed, compared, and reflected while noting specific insights and perspectives of their interactions with their partners in various contexts such as home, school, community, place of worship, and other out-of-school extra-curricular activity centers. Data revealed that the pre-service teachers' previous perceptions and biases were challenged, and subsequently changed because of having had these experiences (Ukpokodu, 2004). Understanding the varied perspectives that both students and teachers bring to the classroom is one key element in addressing the achievement gap. Anderson (2011) maintains that it is indeed possible to address the widening achievement gap that is occurring between our students of color and their white counterparts, but this can only be accomplished if leaders work deliberately to build and utilize culturally proficient practices within their schools. Findings from a study conducted at three comprehensive public high schools in the greater Los Angeles area, using the responses from 195 teachers and 532 students to identify indicators of cultural proficiency, revealed that teachers generally do not perceive students' homes to support school; however, the students of color do feel that their parents support their success in school (Anderson, 2011). This study also revealed that those teachers who do perceive students' homes as being supportive also find their schools to be culturally proficient. Consistent with the findings from Ukpokodu's (2014) research, the impact of this disparity in the socio-cultural mismatch between diverse students and their white, middle class teachers also appears in the research of Anderson (2011). Anderson's (2011) findings also indicated that compatibility between school culture and student culture facilitated effective

communication and positive interactions between teacher, student, and parents.

Furthermore, Anderson's (2011) research has shown a correlation between lowered teacher expectation and teachers' racialized attitudes towards, and beliefs about, the minority students whom they teach. According to Ukpokodu (2004), numerous studies have shown that a majority of white pre-service teachers have negative dispositions toward diverse students, and these attitudes coupled with lowered expectations are major factors contributing to the widespread academic failure among culturally diverse students. Similar findings were revealed from a study conducted in a mainstream school in New Zealand. Mugisha (2013) attempted to uncover the actions of school leaders who were viewed as being Culturally Responsive Instructional Leaders (CRIL). Over the course of the study, criterion sampling was used as a strategy to recruit participants that met the following predetermined criteria: the participants had to be White principals working and living in urban areas in the North Island and had extensive experience as a principal of a mainstream school with substantial numbers of socio-culturally disadvantaged students. Participant recruitment led to the identification of three White male principals: one from a primary school, an intermediate school, and a secondary school. The findings revealed that the principals viewed as being CRIL were purposeful, conscious, intentional, creative, and collaborated with solutions and strategies to address the academic challenges of minority-culture students. Findings also revealed that culturally responsive leadership strategies that were embedded were proven to be more effective. Instructional leadership in intercultural educational settings is not automatically culturally responsive (Mugisha, 2013). Educators using CRIL approaches learn to teach to and through the strengths of diverse students, use varied teaching

strategies, and attempt to bridge cultural differences by talking about individual differences among students and how these differences make for better learning (Gay, 2002, 2010; Sheets, 2005). Thompson and Byrnes (2011), authors of *A More Diverse Circle of Friends*, conducted a quantitative study based on the theoretical framework grounded in the work of Kurt Lewin who theorized that when a person's life space shifts, alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving become apparent to the individual (Schellenberg, 1979). In yet another study conducted by Thompson and Byrnes (2011) in a large school district approximately 65,000 students) in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States, a one-way ANOVA approach was used to analyze whether students in classrooms with teachers identified as culturally competent were more inclusive in their friendships than students in classrooms with untrained teachers. A sociometrical questionnaire was used to collect information on these students' mutual friendships in 12 classrooms. Sociometrical data were collected for all 12 classrooms late in the school year so that students and teachers had worked together for almost a full academic year (Thompson & Byrnes, 2011). The lead researcher visited each classroom and each child was given a list with all the names of the children in his or her class. Each child was asked to circle the names of their friends. There was no limit put on the number of choices that could be made, and no definition of friend was given. The findings of this study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference ($p \leq .05$) in the inclusiveness of students on three of the dependent variables (proportion of cross [race, gender, SES] mutual friendships) with respect to whether they had a culturally competent nominated/trained) or untrained teacher (Thompson & Byrnes, 2011). On all three dependent variables measuring the proportion of cross-group friendships (given

opportunities for such friendships), students with culturally competent teachers had more crossover mutual friendships (Thompson & Byrnes, 2011). Teachers who value and appreciate cultural diversity and who teach in ways that honor their students' diverse needs and abilities appear to be positively creating or co-creating with students' social norms of acceptance, friendship, and respect. Teachers who have been helped to develop cultural competency and who excel at teaching diverse groups of students can be change agents with respect to the social dynamics of their classrooms. As administrators, it becomes our cross to bear; we possess the power to help our students by first helping all teachers regardless of race, to become culturally responsive, not just for our children of color, but for all students.

Another qualitative study conducted by Howard (2001) across four urban elementary schools located in a large city in the northwestern area of the United States during the 1997 – 1998 school years demonstrated the need for cultural competency. A purposeful sample of 17 students was used for the study, 10 girls, and 7 boys. It examined students' perceptions and interpretations of instructional practices used by four elementary-school teachers who were identified as culturally responsive teachers for African-American students. To gain insight into viewpoints that are rarely revealed in the research about teaching ethnically and culturally diverse students and gain an understanding of students' interpretations of the teaching practices, the author chose to use observations and interviews with the students. Three central themes emerged from the interview data with students: (1) the importance of caring teachers, (2) the establishment of a community/family-type classroom environment, and (3) education as entertainment (Howard, 2001). Noddings (1988) wrote, "It is obvious the children will

work harder and do things—even odd things like adding fractions—for people they love and trust” (p. 10). Creating a learning environment that helps students to reach their highest levels of academic achievement and seeks to establish cultural continuity between home and school is essential for students to experience academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1994). High expectations for students are a core element of culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers cannot adopt a “one size fits all” approach to teaching African-American students by assuming that what works for one is suitable for all. It is important for teachers to note that culture is a complex, multidimensional, and multifaceted construct that is continually being transformed by many variables (Gay, 2000). The explicit and implicit showing of the concern and care that teachers have for their students is vital for their learning experience. Teachers can demonstrate care in numerous ways, through positive reinforcement, expression of high expectations, giving praise to student accomplishments, and taking time to find out about students’ lives outside of the classroom. Establishing community strategies can be used to encourage kindred relationships among students by using cooperative learning situations and the elimination of homogeneous ability grouping. Creating stimulating and exciting classroom environments can go a long way in generating student interest and enthusiasm about learning. There is a need for pre-service teacher preparation programs to expose beginning teachers to diverse hands-on experiences in the community during their training so that they will be prepared to work with the diverse populations that they will face in the classroom. According to Lisa Delpit (1995), “if we are to successfully educate all our students, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism. We must

work to destroy those blinders so that it is possible to really see and get to really know the students we must teach” (p.182). Ukpokodu (2004) ascertains that pre-service teachers can often harbor preconceived notions about diverse students; one way to assist them to examine and challenge their “web of beliefs” is by constructing and immersing them in authentic field experiences with diverse students where they learn to shift their views and develop alternative perspectives and possibilities. Ukpokodu (2004) specified the following:

It was clear from his investigation that providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to interact with culturally diverse students made a significant difference in assisting pre-service teachers in removing the blinders built on preconceived notions and enabled them to alter the negative perceptions and dispositions they held about diverse students.

(p. 27)

While effective teachers are the key to meeting the needs of diverse learners and are critical to prepare learners for the twenty-first century, teacher preparation programs must do more to prepare teachers for the culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse student populations that they will encounter in modern day classrooms. Achieving equity in culturally diverse schools is a global challenge and is not solely isolated within the American school systems.

Much research speaks to the need for teaching practices that are responsive to the cultural identities of minority students. Savage and colleagues (2011) report on a study conducted using a mixed-methods research approach to evaluate the impact of how

professional development on culturally responsive pedagogies impacted the teaching practices of secondary teachers of ingenious Maori students. Systematic observations were conducted in slightly over 400 classrooms at 32 mainstream schools across different subjects. Interviews were also conducted with 214 indigenous Maori students. Results showed that most teachers exhibited evidence of culturally responsive practices and students could describe examples of teachers caring for them as culturally located individuals. According to Lindsey and colleagues (2009), becoming culturally proficient is a “mind-set, a world-view” (p. 4). Furthermore, “cultural proficiency is a model for shifting the culture of the school or the district; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change” (Lindsey et al., p. 4). This review of literature reveals that professional development programs for pre-service teachers is an essential need for developing culturally proficient teachers. Wallace and Brand (2012) assert that understanding what teachers need to prepare them to be culturally responsive is a matter of continuous debate. This raises the question: What research has been conducted on professional learning programs that are best suited for helping teachers to incorporate their students’ cultures into learning opportunities? Database searches were conducted and eight studies, including three based in New Zealand, met the specified inclusion criteria. The studies included qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. Main themes and findings include a lack of studies that are designed to collect data on teachers’ implementation of professional development strategies and their impact on student achievement, sampling and researcher bias as common threats to validity, and common characteristics of training such as sustained support, self-awareness, reflection and constructing learning with others. Due to the dissimilarities of the studies reviewed,

for example, with different age groups, for different topic areas and varying aims, no one type of professional development could be identified as the most effective (Smyth, 2013).

Presented next is an outline of key empirical findings.

Table 3

Key Empirical Findings

Authors	Theories	Methods	Samples	Objectives	Findings
Anderson, M. (2011)	Cultural Proficiency	Qualitative study using electronic questionnaire; the teachers were questioned about their own values about different cultures, and their beliefs in working with students of color.	195 mostly white teachers and 532 predominately Latino students from three comprehensive High Schools in the greater Los Angeles area.	Identify indicators of cultural proficiency based on teacher and student perspectives.	The findings in this study reflect that teachers and administrators in urban schools do not feel that the home is supportive of the students' academic success.
Harms, P. J. (2013)	Knowles' theory of adult learning entitled andragogy, Espoused Theory (Argyris & Schon, 1996), Lewin's "Unfreeze - Change - Freeze" Change Management Theory	Qualitative action science research method used.	Thirteen K-2 teachers	The purpose of the study was to implement a professional development program to increase teachers' content knowledge and efficacy in reading instruction.	The researcher concluded that implementation of an Instructional Coaching model of intervention to help k-2 teachers led to teacher's increased competence in reading.
Howard, T. C. (2001).	Culturally relevant pedagogy	Qualitative case study conducted across four urban elementary schools.	Seventeen students from an urban elementary school in a large city in the northwestern area of the United States during 1997–1998. 10 girls and 7 boys participated in the study.	Examination of students' perceptions and interpretations of instructional practices of Culturally Responsive teachers.	The qualitative data revealed three key findings that students preferred in their learning environments (1) teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them, (2) teachers who established community- and family-type classroom environments, and (3) teachers who made

					learning an entertaining and fun process
Ladson-Billings, G. (1995)	Culturally relevant pedagogy	A three-year qualitative study	Eight African-American teachers	Explore cultural relevant teaching in action.	Teachers with culturally relevant pedagogy reported having high expectations for students and established strong home-school connections.
Melchior (2011)	Constructivist theory of human learning and development.	Qualitative case study with two teachers. Data collected via semi structured interviews, observations and journal entries.	Two primary teachers of culturally diverse 5-7-year-olds at an inner-city school in Wellington, NZ	The aim of the project was to find out how generalist primary teachers can develop strategies for teaching and learning dance within meaningful contexts as an integral part of their classroom program.	The teachers reported confidence to teach dance to students and pedagogy to colleagues, and that dance was a useful tool for language development.
Mugisha, V.M. (2013)	Culturally responsive instruction	Naturalistic inquiry; Interviews and a multiple qualitative case studies approach.	Three White male principals: one from a primary school, an intermediate school, and a secondary school.	To understand the intentional actions taken by principals to enhance achievement of minority-culture students.	Findings revealed that principals viewed as Culturally responsive were purposeful, conscious, intentional, creative, and collaborated with solutions to address academic challenges of minority students.

Savage, C., et al. (2011).	Culturally responsive pedagogy	A quasi-experimental design and mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) including document review, student achievement comparisons, analyses of classroom observations, and analyses of interviews with students, teachers, and other school stakeholders.	A total of 33 secondary schools participated in the professional development program. Twelve schools participated for four years and twenty-one participated for two years.	The study's focus was specifically evaluating the extent to which teacher professional development (ETP) on cultural responsive teaching practices impacted student classroom experiences.	Participants exhibited increased evidence of culturally responsive practices and students reported teachers feeling that the teachers cared for them.
Smyth, H. (2013).	Culturally responsive teaching	Mixed-methods systematic review	This systematic review examined eight studies that involved professional development to incorporate students' cultures into their learning opportunities.	The purpose of this mixed-methods systematic review was to gather recent research on professional development programs for culturally responsive primary teaching.	Teachers who participated in the training reported characteristics such as sustained support, self-awareness and becoming more reflective.
Thompson, J., & Byrnes, D. (2011)	<i>A More Diverse Circle of Friends</i>	To analyze whether students in classrooms with teachers identified as culturally competent are more inclusive in their friendships than students in classrooms with untrained teachers.	This study was conducted in a large school district (approx. 65,000 students) in the Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. A sociometrical questionnaire was used to collect information on students' mutual	Students with culturally competent teachers had more crossover mutual friendships.	Teachers who value and appreciate cultural diversity and who teach in ways that honor their students' diverse needs and abilities appear to be positively creating or co-creating with students' social norms

			friendships in 12 classrooms.		of acceptance, friendship, and respect.
Wallace, T. and B. R. Brand (2012).	Critical race theory	This was a qualitative research study	Two middle school science teachers.	(1) How are the practices of effective teachers of African American students manifested in a classroom context? (2) What are the most salient experiences that influenced these teachers' philosophies and pedagogies?	The analysis reveals that the teachers' beliefs and practices were informed by their critical awareness of social constraints imposed upon their African American students' identities. Understanding of racial inequities is crucial to the development of sociocultural awareness,
Ukpokodu, O.N. (2004)	Critical diversity	A mixed qualitative and quantitative research approach study of pre-service teachers	Pre-service teachers	The study investigated the extent to which pre-service teachers' shadowing culturally different students in cross-cultural contexts altered their pre-conceived notions and negative dispositions toward diverse students and engendered their inclination to work in diverse school settings.	When pre-service teachers were provided opportunity to interact with culturally diverse students they became more aware of their own negative perceptions and biases.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used for the study including data collection and data analysis. The purpose for this study was to use an action research approach to explore, evaluate, and gauge the impact of cultural proficiency training on a group of teachers' perceptions, assumptions, and biases. Today's educators are confronted with the challenge of teaching a growing population of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, many of whom are minorities from the poorest segments of society (Overall, 2009).

Creating a school culture that rejects deficit thinking is essential for creating passageways to high achievement for all students. The beliefs of teachers and administrators are critical to creating a school culture that is focused on the talent development of all children. Thus, this action research study used the following questions as a guide for discussion throughout the course of the study: 1). How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary School? 2). What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction? 3). How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency? An overview of and rationale for the qualitative action research approach used for this study is addressed first, followed by a detailed discussion of the data

collection and analysis process used for the study. The conclusion of the chapter addresses limitations to the study as well research subjectivity.

Design of Study

This study followed the case study approach to action research and was supported by qualitative data while allowing for documentation of stakeholder and participant perspectives (Simons, 2009). Furthermore, “Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2008, p. 5). Additionally, case study action research is defined as the study of “the particularity and complexity of a single case” (Simons, 2009, p. 19). This case study was what Simons (2009) terms as theory led: case study. A theory-led case study can mean “exploring or exemplifying a case through a particular theoretical perspective” (Simons, 2009, p. 21). To gain a better perspective of what constitutes a *case*, Stake’s (2006) simplified definition of a case was helpful for making sense of the phenomena occurring at Brookshire Elementary School.

According to Stake (2006), a case is a “noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a verb” (Stake, 2006, p. 1). This case dealt with teachers and the impact that cultural proficiency professional development had on their beliefs, biases, assumptions, and perceptions. Teachers’ cultural competence was the ‘quintain’ explored in this research project. A ‘quintain’ as defined by Stakes (2006) is an “object, or phenomenon or condition to be studied-a target, but not a bull’s eye” (p. 6). Three theories were used to guide, construct, and view this study: Cultural Proficiency Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory. The rationale for choosing the

Cultural Proficiency Theory, the Social Capital Theory, and Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory was that when employed these theories suggest that when teachers of diverse learners develop and maintain cultural relevant pedagogy (CRP), which according to Gay (2000) are those ideals and beliefs that "teach to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students," that these students will be successful in the learning environment. In addition, culturally proficient teachers acknowledge the home-community cultures of their students, are sensitive to cultural nuances, and integrate these cultural experiences, values, and understandings into the teaching and learning environment. According to Ghosh (2014), the word 'culture' is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group.

The second theory, the Social Capital Theory is constructed on the premises that, in the absence of social capital, minorities who are unable to maneuver the current societal bridges and barriers within schools tend to fall through the cracks and are frequently viewed by teachers as not capable of learning. According to Mahmood (2015), there are various forms of capital operating within society, "these mainly include intellectual capital, environmental capital, cultural capital and social capital" (p. 114). Which leads me to the third theory, Mezirow's (1997) Theory of Transformative learning which closely aligns with Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell's (2009) theory of cultural proficiency. According to Mezirow (1997), as adults we have an "acquired coherent body of experiences—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define how we view the world" (p. 5). Refer to *Figure 2* for the visual representation of how these three theories work together.

Qualitative Research

Merriam (2009) defines qualitative research as a way for gaining an understanding of why and how a phenomenon occurs. Unlike quantitative research which strives for determining cause and effect, “qualitative researchers seek to understand —how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Within qualitative research, there are multiple types of approaches and methodologies. For my case, an action research methodology was appropriate for examining the impact of cultural proficiency professional development upon a select group of teachers’ beliefs, feelings, perceptions, and biases.

Action Research Methodology

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2005), Action Research (AR) is a partnership which engages all team members in a process of problem solving. “Knowing- in- action is grounded in the inquiry reflection process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Human knowing is what Coghlan and Brannick (2005) term a three-step heuristic process of experiences, understanding and judgement. AR does not provide a set of fixed prescriptions that can be applied, but rather a flexible and practical set of procedures that are “systematic, cyclical, solution oriented, and participatory” (Stringer, 2014, p. 5). Unlike more traditional approaches to research, AR engages both the researcher(s) and subjects. A key characteristic of AR is its collaborative nature. The research is engaged in continuous cycles of planning, acting, and evaluation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). AR, as depicted in figure 3, can be described as a natural extension of our daily activities (Stringer, 2007). The action research cycle represented below (see figure 3) served as the

guide for evaluating the impact of cultural proficiency professional learning on teacher biases, perception, and attitudes.

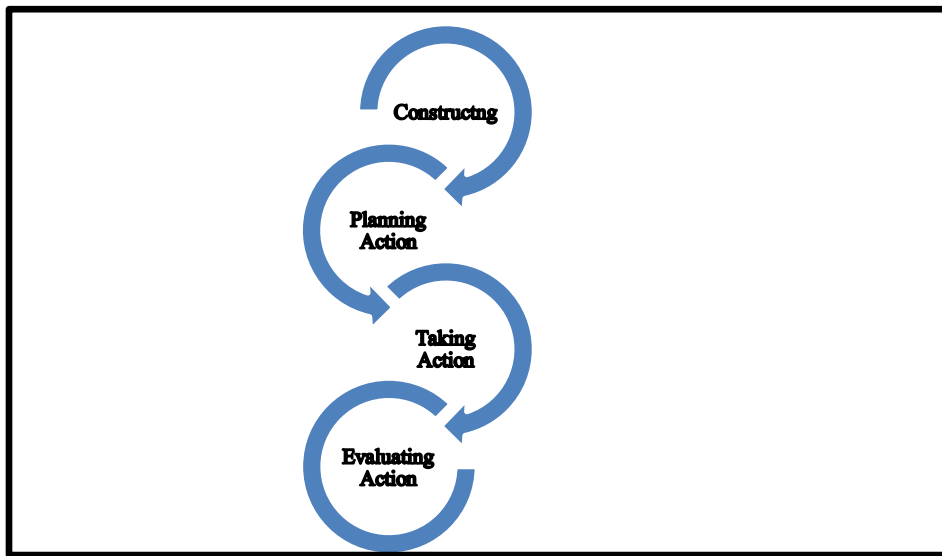


Figure 3. Spiral of Action Research Cycle

Research Sample

In preparation for this case study, CITI training was completed and approved in October of 2014. The first task upon arrival at Brookshire Elementary was to do as Coghlan and Brannick (2005) suggested, which was to work on cultivating relationships with all faculty members with attention given to building relationships with the principal, assistant principal, and potential members of my research team at Brookshire Elementary.

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2005), there are stages through which one progresses during the action research process. It is important to develop interpersonal skills which lead to building trust, suspending one's own beliefs, and finally accepting differences within one's own organization. Since the fall of 2015, two action research teams were assembled to help address the purpose and questions of this qualitative action research case study. Selected research participants met one of the three criteria.

- Certificated K-5 teacher at Brookshire Elementary
- Expressed an interest in volunteering to participate in this case study
- Signed participant consent form to be a part of the case study

Proposals for IRB approval were submitted May 2016 to both Clarke County School District and The University of Georgia (UGA). IRB approval was obtained for both Clarke county and UGA in August 2016.

Participants

All faculty members were invited via email to participate in this case study. Two groups were assembled. Each group maintained its individual role and responsibility throughout this action research study. For the purposes of this case study, group one was referred to as the AR Team and group two was referred to as the Focus Group or Intervention group. Eight certificated teachers agreed to be collaborative members of this action research team. Group one, the AR team, initially had four teachers, three remained consistent throughout the research study. Group two, the 'Focus Group' remained consistent throughout the study with 5 participants. The classroom teaching experience of the participants for both groups ranged from 2 years of classroom experience to 20 plus years of classroom experience (See Tables 4 and 5). Both action research teams worked after school hours, approximately 3:30-4:30 one day per month beginning in September.

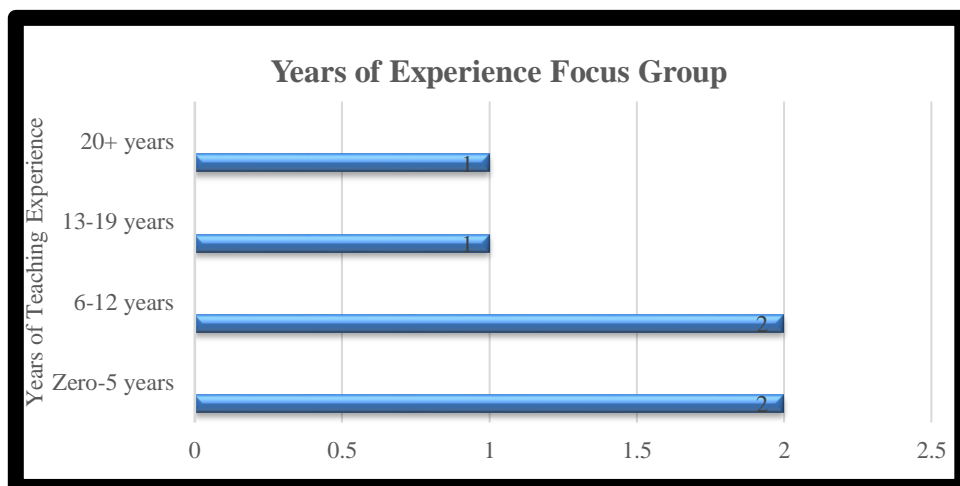


Table 4
Focus Group Participants

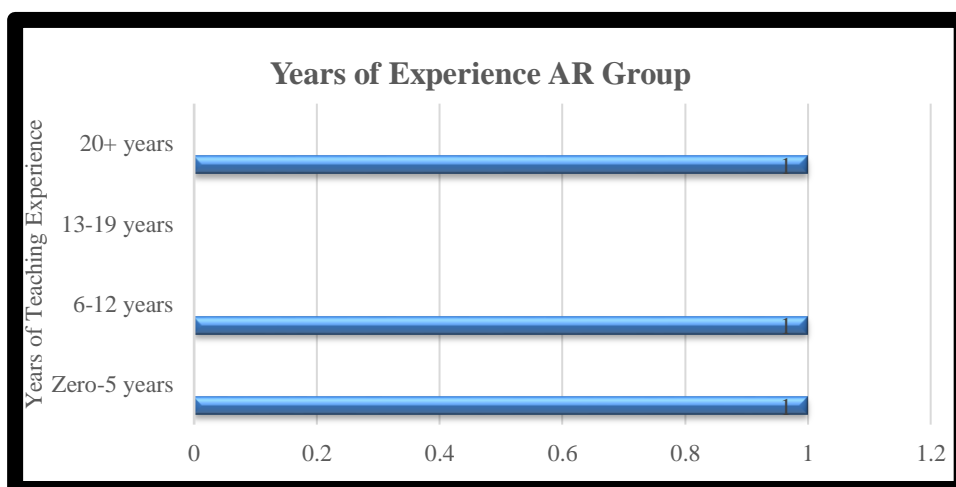


Table 5
Intervention Group Participants

In any action research project, there can be multiple action research cycles operating concurrently (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). This case study was conducted and completed over the course of one research cycle.

Research Site

Brookshire Elementary School (BES), served as the research site for this study. BES is a K-5 public school in the northern quadrant of Williams County. Meetings were

held in the researcher's classroom during after school hours. Case study meetings were conducted the second Monday of each month; however, as the study progressed alternate days were chosen.

Data Collection

According to Simons (2009), "three qualitative methods often used in case study research to facilitate in-depth analysis and understanding" are "interviews, observations, and document analysis" (p. 33). Simons (2009) suggest selecting the methods with the greatest potential to inform one's action research questions. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) caution that as the action research story unfolds, unforeseen events are likely to occur, and that the researcher must be attentive and remain responsive to maintain the core process of the action research.

The first cycle of data collection was slated for early August 2016, but was physically collected in early September 2016. Focus Group members completed a brief three minutes cultural proficiency questionnaire. Additional data was collected from Focus Group meetings over a period of six months. Interview data was collected from one Focus group participant and from one AR group participant. Field notes and researcher journal entries documented the study as it unfolded (Stringer, 2007). Audio-recording of AR team and Focus group meetings was collected and coded for patterns and themes over the course of the study. Additionally, the research questions served as guides, facilitated credibility and kept the study on course (Simons, 2009, p. 31). Refined research questions provided an adequate frame for the case study and aided in the interpretation of results.

Finally, observation was used as a final method of data collection and was captured through journal entries. According to Simons (2009) observations over time, when linked with interviews, observations help ensure that there are no misrepresentations and supports triangulation of the data. The plans used for researching the interventions, understanding the problem as it unfolded, and data analysis is displayed below (see Tables 6 & 7).

Preliminary Data Collection

As the demographics of schools have changed, educators have been successful in some locales, but for the most part continue to struggle to serve all students equitably (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). According to King, Artiles, and Kozleski (2009), professional learning for culturally responsive teaching has the potential to address achievement gaps across ethnic groups as well as the disproportionate representation in special education for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The presumption of entitlement and privilege; believing that one's personal achievements and societal benefits are due solely to merit and the quality of one's character can often make people blind to the barriers experienced by those who are culturally different from them (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 5). Two tools were used for collecting baseline perception data on cultural awareness, and the participants' understanding of cultural proficiency. First, the teacher perception survey was administered via email to the five Focus Group participants. The questionnaire was developed and delivered via *Survey Monkey*. Survey Monkey is an online survey development cloud-based software founded in 1999 by Ryan Finley. The questionnaire was administered in two parts on two

separate meeting days. Part 1 consisted of 10 questions, four of which required multiple-choice responses and six required short answer responses. The questions are as follows:

1. How many years of classroom experience have you completed?
2. What is your highest level of academic training?
3. List Respondent's certification
4. Select the grade level that you have taught
5. Where were you born?
6. Whom do you consider family?
7. What was your first language spoken?
8. What is your religion? How observant is your practice in this religion?
9. What activities do you enjoy when you are not working?
10. How do you identify yourself culturally?

Five Focus Group participants completed the first part of the survey during the first 10 minutes of a 45 minutes weekly Professional Learning Committee meeting (PLC). Based on the responses generated, 3.3% of the participants had completed at least five years of classroom experience, 33.3% had completed between six to twelve years classroom experience, and 16.67% had completed between 13-19 years of classroom experience, with 16.6 % of the participants reported completing twenty plus years of classroom experience (see table 4). Part 2 of the questionnaire was delivered during the following week's PLC via Survey Monkey. The participants were again provided the first 10 to 15 minutes of the weekly grade-level PLC meeting to complete part 2 of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete nine questions intended to gauge their

understanding of culture, cultural identities, and cultural proficiency. Part 2 questions were as follows:

1. How do you identify yourself culturally?
2. What aspects of being ____ are most important to you? Use the same term for the identified culture.
3. How do you describe your home and your neighbors?
4. Are there specific gender roles and expectations in your family?
5. Whom do you consider family?
6. How much importance do you place on work, family, and education?
7. What was the educational expectation for the children within your family?
8. What holidays do you celebrate?
9. Do you consider yourself to be culturally competent? If so, in what ways?

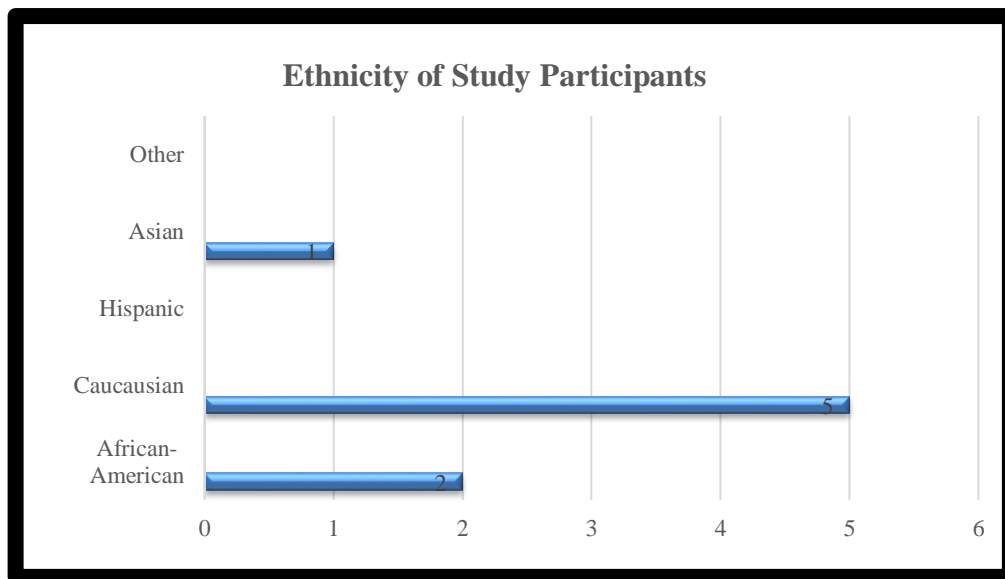


Table 6
Ethnicity of Study Participants

Only four participants completed part two of the survey, the one participants who did not complete the survey was on an extended absence due to unforeseen health issues.

A reminder was sent out to the participant to complete part two when they were recovered. The participant completed the questionnaire later during the study and self-identified as African-American. Out of the four participants who completed part two of the survey, 100% identified themselves culturally as Caucasian. Study participants ethnicity can be seen in Table six. Additional findings from the part two questionnaire will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

Cultural Proficiency Intervention Modules

The Focus Group, which consisted of five K-5 certificated teachers agreed to participate in and complete six 45- minute modules adapted from the Teaching Tolerance organization which has been in operation since 1991. Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children (tolerance.org). It is based upon an anti-bias framework, which is the road map for anti-bias education at each grade level. I contacted the *Tolerance.org* website on two separate occasions requesting permission to use and modify resources for study use, but was unsuccessful at each attempt. The intervention modules were organized into four domains, Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action. *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* was the module selected for intervention. These professional development modules supported educators in the process of examining common beliefs that may help and/or hinder the work with racially and ethnically diverse students. For this study, only two of the four domains were covered, identity and diversity. Module one covered identity and was completed over the course of two meeting periods. I chose to focus solely on these two modules for the study because they closely aligned with Milner's Opportunity Gaps Explanatory Framework (2015).

Opportunity gaps, especially those linked to diversity, exist at all levels of education (Milner, 2015). When interconnected, the following five areas are critical in helping bridge and shed light on opportunity gaps: (1) rejection of color-blindness; (2) ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend cultural conflicts; (3) ability to understand how meritocracy operates; (4) ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mind-sets; and (5) rejection of context neutral mind sets and practices (Milner, 2015, p. 14). Identity consists of various characteristics and people often use multiple categories to categorize and define themselves. Sometimes people only think of identity as those visible characteristics of a person, but sometimes our identity characteristics are invisible (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). To provide the Focus group participants with a clear and solid understanding of identity, I chose to divide module one into Parts A and Parts B. Identity is the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing or person is definitively recognized or known; set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Module one Part-A was conducted over a 45-minute period. The Focus group participants received definitions of identity and sorted identity characteristics as visible or invisible. Five participants completed the activity. Module one-part B focused on understanding how identity is developed. Module two also covered identity and this session's focus was on the impact of our identity on our relationships.

Finally, module three's focus was on color-blindness. I decided to modify module three due to the direction of the study. Two of the Focus group participants expressed strong feelings about the definition of color-blind as it fit into their current schema of

understanding. As stated by Coghlan and Brannick (2014), “the structure of human knowing is a three-step heuristic process which involves ones experiences, understanding, and judgment” (p. 22). Further discussion of the data obtained from the intervention modules will be discussed in Chapter five and Chapter six.

Interviews

The theoretical assumptions of the researcher “whether explicit or not” inform the design of the interview questions and representation of data (Roulston, 2014). Simons (2009) suggests that there are four major purposes for interviewing: “first is to document the interviewee’s perspective on the topic, second is to actively engage the interviewee in identifying and analyzing the issue, third is the inherent flexibility that it offers to change direction to pursue emergent issues, and fourth is the potential for uncovering and representing unobserved feelings and events” (Simons, 2009, p. 43). Three interviews were conducted during the study.

First, an interview was conducted early during the study before the intervention was implemented with a randomly selected member from the Focus Group seeking to address the research question: How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary? I considered interview one pre-data.

Second, an interview was conducted with a randomly selected member of the AR group with the intent to address and possibly answer the following research question: How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers’ cultural proficiency? Thirdly, the final interview was conducted with a separate randomly selected member of the Focus group.

Researcher Field Notes

A researcher journal was maintained throughout the study. This journal included handwritten field notes from Focus group discussions, reflective conversations had with members of the Focus group, documented confusions about color-blindness, and general overall observations made by as to the progress of the study.

Data Analysis

According to Easton (2009), data when understood and utilized effectively, is a “vehicle for school improvement” (p. 19). Easton’s Cycle of Inquiry was used early in the study as the process for data analysis (see Figure 2). Means and colleagues (2010) found that “data can be used for three reasons: accountability, instruction, and evaluation” (Mandinach & Jackson, 2012, p. 30). Collected data was used to ultimately evaluate, assess, and determine the need for cultural proficiency training within Brookshire Elementary School.

During the first meeting held with the AR participants, achievement data was reviewed and possible theories for the gap in reading achievement between the Hispanic learners and African-American learners at Brookshire Elementary School was discussed initially with the AR participants. Data as a base for problem identification is the first cycle in Easton’s Cycle of Inquiry (see Figure 4).

Easton’s Cycle of Inquiry

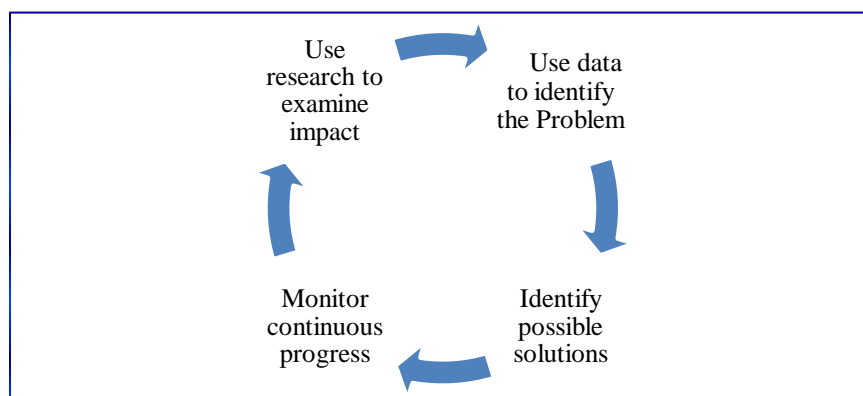


Figure 4. Data Analysis Process

An overview of the study was provided to the group with special consideration given to ensure that each participant understood the cycle of action research and the role that they would play in helping me with the study. An audio-recording of the meeting was made and hand transcribed. The first data collected was the teacher perception data. Survey Monkey was an effective tool for organizing this data. I made hard copies of the generated graphs and summary responses made by members of the focus group. Knowing that the teacher perception data would be shared with the AR team was another reason for choosing Survey Monkey as a data collecting tool. This tool allowed for data aggregation with any identifying indicators and provided privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the Focus group participants. Data was compiled and organized according to question. Teacher cultural proficiency questionnaire data was analyzed by the AR team. This qualitative data was used to gauge teachers' growth and awareness of culturally proficient practices. Interviews, AR Team meeting audio-recordings, and Focus group recordings were analyzed and assessed using a Descriptive Coding Method. As stated by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), coding is "prompts or triggers for deeper reflection on the data's meaning" (p. 73). Two cycles of coding were used in this case study. "Saldana (2013) divides coding into two major stages: First Cycle and Second Cycle coding" (p. 73). In Vivo Coding and Emotion Coding were used to analyze the data collected from audio-recordings of AR team meetings and Focus Group meetings. Individual and group interviews were analyzed using the same methods.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Research is a natural extension of many activities in which we engage in every day (Stringer, 2014). Its primary purpose is “to provide the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry” and perhaps find solutions for phenomena occurring in their daily lives (Stringer, 2014, p 91). Stringer (2014) warns that “in their enthusiasm that researchers may fail to engage the systematic and rigorous processes that are the hallmarks of good research” (p. 92). Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers must check for the trustworthiness by ensuring that the research is rigorous. Stringer (2014) states that “rigor in action research is based on checks to ensure that the outcomes of research are trustworthy – that they do not merely reflect the particular perspectives, biases, or worldview of the researcher and that they are not based solely on superficial or simplistic analyses of the issues investigated” (p. 92). Checks for trustworthiness must be designed and implemented throughout the research cycle. “Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness can be established through procedures that assess the following attributes of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Stringer, 2014, p. 92). The following checks established to ensure rigor in this action research study is explained in greater detail below.

Credibility

“In action research credibility of the research is a fundamental issue (Stringer, 2014). Participants must be able to trust the integrity of the process. To safeguard credibility, this study was designed so to generate multiple data sources which allowed for data triangulation. In addition, member checking was incorporated in this study in the form of establishing a “control” group, the Focus group participants and by establishing a

“intervention” group-the AR participants in this study. Finally, as a third layer for ensuring credibility this study was implemented over an extended period, which allowed for persistent observation of events, activities, and happening as the study unfolded.

Transferability

Quantitative research or “experimental” research typically allows for the outcomes of the research to be generalized across specific context or groups (Stringer, 2014). Typically, action research outcomes apply only to people and places that were a part of the study. I ensured transferability in this study by providing a detailed account of description of the context, activities, and events in chapter 3. Additionally, the analysis, conclusions, and implications were discussed in chapter 6.

Dependability

An inquiry audit provides a detailed description of procedures followed thus providing a basis for dependability (Stringer, 2014). In this study, I made audio-recordings of interviews and meetings held with both my Focus group and my AR group. Coghlan and Brannick’s (2010) research cycle was followed and allowed for continuous cycles of planning, acting, and evaluation.

Confirmability

Stringer (2014) states that an audit trail is essential for providing confirmability that the research took place. This study generated observable forms of data in the forms of two transcribed interviews, audio recordings, journal entries, and researcher coding data.

Limitations of Study

Although action research is gaining increased support in the professional community it has yet to be accepted by many academics researchers as a legitimate form of inquiry” (Stringer, 2014). Action research, as does all research, starts with a problem to be solved; however, its primary goal is not the production of a large body of knowledge that can be generalized to large populations (Stringer, 2014). Case studies research are usually studies more of the particularization than of generalizations (Stake, 2006). This case study involves a specific phenomenon occurring in a specific location, which make findings and conclusions difficult to generalize. Stake (2009) reminds us that the power of the case is its attention to the local situation, not how it represents other cases in general. Stringer (2014) concurs by stating that action research is based on the ‘proposition that generalized solutions, plans, or programs may not fit all context or groups to whom they applied and that the purpose of inquiry is to find an appropriate solution for the particular dynamic at work in a local situation” (p. 6). As the researcher my own self-awareness, closeness to the issues, how I frame the issues, and so on have been critical as this study progressed. Individual learning- in- action typically involves being able to reflect on your experience, understand it and enact chosen alternate behaviors (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

Researcher Subjectivity

Ratner (2002) argues that qualitative research is subjective and guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and even to interpreting data. As a graduate student, I was excited by the possibilities of being able to solve problems in action; problems that affect me as an educator and are specific to my situation. Stringer (2014) reminds us that action research

is a natural extension of activities in which we engage in every day of our lives. Specific phenomena that require us to take time out from the bustle of our busy lives to seek solutions to practical problems.

Culture and its impact upon how we interact with one another as humans has always intrigued me. As an experienced educator, it puzzled me why many minorities were continually lagging their peers in the core content areas of reading and math. Through this study I could experience firsthand what it felt like to be a change agent. “Culturally proficient teachers add value and dignity to children’s lives and a dimension of professionalism to their artistry as teachers and leaders” (Lindsey & Terrell, 2012, p 2). “Educational research has for many years attempted to explain the relationship between teaching and learning and leadership and learning” (Lindsey & Terrell, 2012, p, xvi). This study served as a tool for facilitating sensitive conversations centered around race, biases, prejudices, and assumptions. Additionally, this study provided an avenue for testing theory. Cultural proficiency is an approach for responding to the environment shaped by its diversity (Lindsey & Terrell, 2012). This study has a direct impact on the educational leaders at Brookshire Elementary and throughout the Williams County School District. Increasing diversity within today’s classrooms has erected formidable barriers and made teaching students a challenge for teachers. According to Meece and Wingate (2010), high quality teaching is an essential element in providing children with support, feedback, and positive communication. This study shows a direct relationship between participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies and increased teachers’ cultural proficiency. Culturally proficient teachers are better equipped to handle twenty first century learners.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY REPORT

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of cultural proficiency training on teacher attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. The questions guiding this case study action research project are as follows: (1) How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school? (2) How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency? and (3) What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction? This chapter expounds the story of this action research study as it unfolded in real-time. An overview of the context of the study is also provided along with a snapshot of the steps taken during the study. The four steps of constructing, planning, acting, and evaluating are presented in greater detail.

Context

This action research case study was conducted over the course of one AR cycle. Brookshire Elementary School, the context of this study, is a part of the Williams County School District located in the southeastern part of the United States. In theory, the study began the fall of 2014. While working as an instructional coach in a conservative and isolated, rural school district, I noticed alarming trends being revealed within reading test data. Data exposed discrepancies in reading scores between African-American students and White students. As a former reading specialist, this condition was not only

perplexing but intriguing. At the time, I was the Instructional Coach for my school and thus responsible for overseeing student achievement. During this period, a close friend currently working on her doctorate informed me of the development of a new cohort at a nearby university. After my being accepted, discussions with my lead professor solidified my decision to explore this discrepancy over the course of obtaining my doctorate degree? To my delight, much research had been conducted on the achievement gap between Caucasian and African-American students.

Story and Outcomes

Amid compiling a literature review, an unforeseen shortage in Title 1 funding necessitated a change in school districts the spring semester of 2015. Despite the alternate school setting and transitioning back into the classroom, the puzzle remained - what could be the underlying cause for differences in reading achievement among African-American and White students? Having conducted an extensive literature review of the achievement gap between African-American students and their White counterparts, I was not surprised that the achievement data at Brookshire Elementary School revealed similar findings. Serving a predominantly African-American and Hispanic population, Brookshire's data revealed an additional discrepancy. Not only were the low percentage of Caucasian students out performing their African-American peers in reading, but so were the Hispanic learners. Many researchers argued that there was not a "biological basis for the superiority of Whites" (Milner, 2010, p. 4). Then, what could be accounting for these identical discrepancies occurring between minority subgroups? Surprisingly, the literature was silent regarding this phenomenon taking place at Brookshire Elementary School.

The Recruitment Process

Intervention Team Members

Upon arrival at Brookshire Elementary in August of 2015, I began to cultivate and build relationships. Being a new hire and in the thick of my study development, my focus was on developing a collaborative team. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) stresses that groups and teams engaging in the action research steps is paramount. My third-grade team mates were the obvious choice. By the end of the 2015-2016 school year, I was on my way towards the development of a small group of potential research participants. Tina, a first year third grade teacher, Dreamer, a third year second grade teacher, and Angie, an experienced kindergarten teacher comprised my initial Focus group; however, due to commination and relational issues the year ended with only Angie communicating a solid commitment. Over the course of the summer, I was informed that I would be changing grade levels. Again, my obvious choice as a research team was my grade-level, specifically due to the collaborative structure of our grade-level professional learning committee meetings. The action research team was selected and finalized the fall of 2016. The members were Kathy, a second-year teacher; Ellie, also a second-year teacher; Mindy, an experienced teacher of twelve years; Jessie, a twenty year plus special education teacher; and Pam, an Early Intervention teacher with fifteen years teaching experience.

Action Research Team Members: Once the Focus members were set, I could reach out to additional colleagues willing to serve as my AR team. After receiving approval from the district to conduct my action research at Brookshire Elementary school and with my

principal's approval, I could recruit two additional group members. Angie, an experienced kindergarten teacher agreed to join this group; additionally, Peggy, a second-year pre-k teacher; and Michelle, an experience gifted and talented teacher of twelve years finalized the AR team.

The Action Research Process Timeline

Constructing (Diagnosing): Meeting 1: October 2016

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2014) the constructing phase is the first step in the action research cycle and is considered a “dialogic activity in which the stakeholders of the project engage in constructing what the issues are” (p. 16). “Action research requires that all participants engage in communications that facilitates the development of harmonious relationships and the effective attainment of group or organizational objectives” (Stringer, 2014, p. 26). When communication in action research is effective, everyone listens attentively to one another, accepts and acts on what they say, can be understood by everyone, are truthful and sincere, acts in socially and culturally appropriate ways, and regularly advises others of happenings within the group (Stringer, 2014). As I have two groups who performed different functions during this study, my AR team who consisted of Angie, a kindergarten teacher, Peggy a pre-k teacher, and Michelle, a teacher of the gifted and talented met after school hours in my classroom. The first meeting was held in October of 2016. In this meeting, the team members were provided an agenda which included the following:

- Welcome/Purpose
- Signing of Consent Forms
- Overview of study/cultural proficiency

- Set future meeting dates/times

My critical Milestone's defense presentation was ideal for providing the team an overview and purpose for this study. The team was given an overview of the school, the context of the study, and the school demographics were also shared. By sharing CRCT data, the group could glean a clear picture of the problem that was occurring at Brookshire Elementary School. Next, I shared the theoretical framework, provided the group with definitions of the Cultural Proficiency Theory, the Social Capital Theory, and Mezirow's Adult Learning Theory. Key theorist and theories were shared as well. Before the conclusion of meeting one, the purpose statement and research questions were shared with the team. Meeting one ended by setting the meeting date for meeting two.

Planning Action: November 9, 2016

In this second meeting with the AR team, the action research cycle below was used to further explain to the team the role that they each would play in the study. It is important that the constructing step is a collaborative venture: that is- that the researcher is cognizant to ensure that others are engaged in the process of constructing and is not the expert who decides this apart from others (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). I reiterated to the group the importance of their impute in uncovering possible reasons and solutions for the following:

1. How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency?
2. What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction?

3. How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary School?

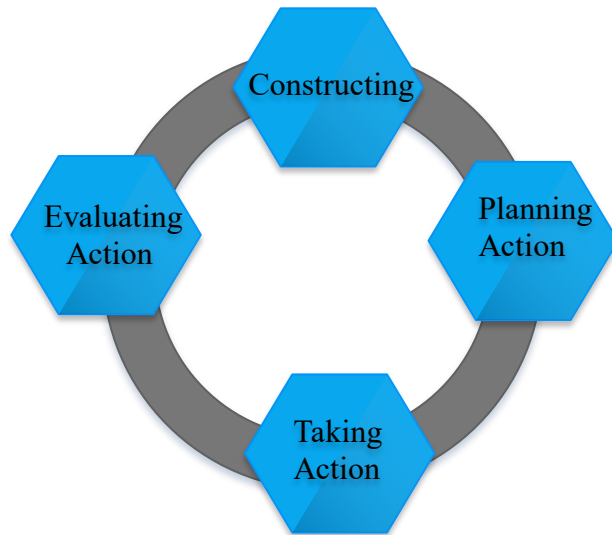


Figure 5. Action Research Approach

Following the review of the research question, Angie commented,

“My observation is even though parents cannot speak the language they are willing to help no matter what, but a lot of African-American kids are left with no help, so I think the gap is related to how much help these students are getting at home.”

Peggy followed by stating,

“I was thinking that the Hispanic kids are putting more emphasis on understanding English where the African-American students understand English already and it’s not as much of an emphasis on learning the language.”

Acting: Beginning August 2016-March 2017

At this stage in the study, the study research plan was implemented and the interventions were put in place. This intervention plan below was followed over the course of this action research project (see Tables 7 and table 8).

The Research Plan

Research Question	Anticipated Data to be collected	Analysis Approach	Proposed Timeline
How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Fowler Drive Elementary school?	Participants in the focus group will be asked to complete a brief 2 to 3-minute pre/post cultural proficiency questionnaire. Random one-on-one teacher interviews will be conducted with two members from each group; two teachers from the AR team will be interviewed and two teachers from the Focus group will be interviewed. Audio recording of AR and focus group discussion may solicit useful data.	It is anticipated that the following approaches to analyzing data will be used through-out this action research project: In Vivo Coding, and Process Coding will be used to analysis data collected from audio-recordings of the AR team meetings and Focus Group Meetings. Individual and Group interviews will be analyzed electronically most likely using Copy Talk. Interview data will be coded and categorized for occurring themes	It is anticipated that this part of the AR case study will occur during the fall semester of the 2016-2017 school year.
How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency?	The AR team participants will assist the researcher in examining the effectiveness of professional development modules on culturally responsive instruction on teacher's attitudes, beliefs, biases, and student perception. Pre/Post test data will also be analyzed to gauge teacher perception of the professional learning process.	In Vivo Coding, and Process Coding will be used to analysis data collected from audio-recordings of the AR team meetings and Focus Group Meetings. Individual and Group interviews will be analyzed electronically most likely using Copy Talk. Interview data will be coded and categorized for occurring themes	Anticipated Data generated from August of 2016 to March of 2017 informed this research question.
What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction?	The AR team will participate in overview training on cultural proficiency. Afterwards which they will analyzes and examines pretest data from the teacher questionnaires. AR group audio recording will serve as data that address these questions as will the random individual interviews conducted from both teams.	Audio-recording of AR team meetings will be analyzed using In Vivo coding.	Anticipated Data generated from August of 2016 to March of 2017 informed this research question.

Table 7
Action Research Timeline

The Intervention Plan

Intervention	Action Research Team (What will the Team Do?)	Anticipated Outcomes/Connections to Problem	Timeline
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Activity Modules	The AR team of teachers will work after school hours, approximately 3:30-4:30, in order to collaboratively examine non-identifiable student reading achievement data in order to explore possible causes for discrepancies in reading achievement between Hispanic and African American learners, examine teacher pre/post perception data to determine the impact of cultural proficiency training on teachers' perception, beliefs, and attitudes on student learning, and at the completion of this action research cycle, team one will assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the cultural proficiency modules as possible interventions for increasing teachers' cultural proficiency for use as professional development tool for the summer of 2017. The "intervention group", will participate in six 30 to 45-minute modules on cultural proficiency and tolerance over the course of six months. Prior to beginning the modules, each focus group member will be asked to complete a very brief 2 to 3-minute cultural proficiency questionnaire. Results will be used as baseline data for evaluation and examination of beliefs, biases, perceptions, of the intervention group.	The literature review on the importance of teachers of diverse students being culturally proficient. Students with culturally proficient teachers implementing culturally responsive instruction (CRT) will experience academic success. Teachers who understand cultural relevant pedagogy (CRP) teach to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students and research shows that these students will be successful in the learning environment. Importantly, the anticipated outcome will be more self-reflective and critically evaluation of one's biases, beliefs, and assumptions, which will lead to increased culturally competent teachers.	Pending IRB approval, the AR team will meet August 2016 to receive an overview of cultural proficiency and the AR process, analyze student achievement data, discuss possible contributors, and provide feedback and suggestions. Focus group pre-surveys will be administered early August. Interventions modules are anticipated to begin early September 2016. Project completion is slated for March 2017.

Table 8
Intervention Delivery Timeline

Action Research Timeline

Date	Events
Phase I	
August 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gain IRB Approval ○ Finalize AR Team ○ Obtain AR team consent forms ○ Establish meeting agenda/ norms with AR team ○ Provide an overview of the Action Research process, ○ Administer 2 to 3 minute “Focus Group” group survey ○ Review school achievement, demographic and RTI data with AR team
Phase II	
September 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Send off audio-recordings of AR team meeting ○ Review/ Analyze “focus group” data transcribed data with AR Team ○ Conduct Module 1 with intervention group ○ Analyze and code data from Focus group meeting one
Phase III	
October-November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct Module 2 with intervention team ○ Interview 2 members from the Focus Groups, and 2 from Intervention Group ○ Code/analysis interview data ○ Meet with AR team review transcribed Interview data ○ Defend CMS 2
Phase IV	
December 2016 – January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct Modules 3 & 4 with intervention group ○ Send audio recordings off to be transcribed ○ Code transcriptions of intervention group ○ Share transcriptions with AR team/revaluate interventions if needed ○ Transcribe and code audio recordings of AR team

	Phase V
February-March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete activity modules with Focus Group ○ Share/analyze transcription data with AR group
	Phase VI
April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete all coding/data analysis ○ Meet with AR team discuss data findings ○ Make recommendations ○ Begin writing CMS# 3

Table 9
Action Research Timeline

Evaluating Action: April-May 2016

At the completion of this action research cycle, the AR team data assisted in evaluating the effectiveness of the cultural proficiency modules as possible interventions for increasing teachers' cultural proficiency. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), The outcomes of the action, both intended and unintended should be examined for the following:

- a. Did the original construction fit?
- b. Were the actions taken a match for the original constructing?
- c. Were the actions taken in an appropriate manner
- d. Is second research cycle of constructing, planning, and action necessitated?

Conclusion

“Any student who emerges into our culturally diverse society speaking only one language and with a monocultural perspective on the world can legitimately be considered educationally ill prepared” (Sonia Nieto, 2004, p. xi). Becoming culturally proficient enables educators, schools, and districts to respond effectively to people who differ from one another. This study provided the opportunity for me to witness firsthand the dissonance faced by educators striving to educate students of a race different from their own. As so eloquently stated by Lisa Delpit, the author of *Other People's Children*, “We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different” (p. xxiv). As educators, we are called to teach, but “how can we reach the worlds of others when we don't even know they exist?”

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of cultural proficiency training on teacher attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. The questions guiding this case study are as follows: (1) How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school? (2) How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency? (3) What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction? This chapter presents the findings from interviews with both Focus group and AR team participants, questionnaires completed by Focus Group participants, audio-recordings of AR participant and Focus group participant meeting discussions conducted over the course of this study. The findings are organized by research question followed by analysis of In Vivo coded data.

Research Findings

Research Question	Findings from Data
1. How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Differences are manifested by a breakdown in communication between teachers and students.▪ Differences are also manifested by emotional, angry student outbursts.

2. How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in cultural proficiency training led teachers to relate self-identity with its impact on interactions with others.
3. What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biases, perceptions, and assumptions can alter how educators view those different from ourselves. Professional development is needed for the teachers at Brookshire Elementary School. Poverty is a factor in low student achievement at Brookshire Elementary School.

Table 10
Research Findings from Data

How are cultural differences manifested between teachers and students?

The five Focus group participants and two of the three AR participants were asked during the post-questionnaire how they perceived that the cultural differences between students and teachers was manifested at Brookshire Elementary? Probing questions were also asked on the initial survey to gauge the participants' understandings of cultural proficiency prior to the intervention. One participant felt that there was a cultural disconnect between students and teachers occurring at Brookshire. Pam, a support staff teacher reflected,

“This question has no easy answer. I believe that there are cultural misunderstandings here at Brookshire”. I also feel that White teachers get a bad

rap because many of the students we teach do not look like us.” Pam further reflected by saying, “Many of us are compassionate and striving to reach and teach children that’s why we are in this profession.”

Pam elaborated further by adding,

“I am in a bit of a different situation because my mother was Mexican and thus a minority; I can relate to many of my students and the customs and traditions that they have at home.”

Pam’s response is very typical of many White teachers who teach minority students. “Many teachers may feel overwhelmed by the social and economic factors that create hardships for students and their families every day” (Howard, 2010, p. 2). “The confluence of race, class, and culture plays out in classrooms every day; many practitioners are well meaning, but ill equipped to structure teaching and learning arrangements in their classrooms to build on students’ cultural knowledge” (Howard, 2010, p. 4). As Pam, the support teacher, shared on her post questionnaire when attempting to identify issues of culture and the role that race plays *“there is no easy answer.”* Howard (2010) exerts that “culture is a multifaceted concept situated within historical context.” It is essential that we help novice educators experience, acquire, maintain and build cultural competence (Howard, 2010).

Mindy, a veteran teacher, concurred with Pam’s thoughts about culture. She too felt that verbalizing cultural differences between students and teachers was not a simplistic task. She added to the discussion by saying,

“I see the cultural differences between teachers and students in discipline issues.”

“Some students and teachers differ...in what they think is disrespectful, and what

is not disrespectful.” “Some students may be allowed to show behaviors at home that are not seen as appropriate at school.”

Many teachers express feeling like Mindy; however, what they fail to understand is that the cause of cultural conflict is their own perception of what it means to be “normal.” According to Milner (2015) what is considered as “normal” classroom behavior can be informed by race, socioeconomic status, and language. Milner (2015) explains that cultural conflicts occur when teachers, who are operating from their own cultural ways of knowing, encounter students whose cultural experiences are different and inconsistent with the teacher’s experiences. “Cultural conflicts sometimes result in a resistant, oppositional, or confrontational environment” where educators are fighting to control students and to exert their power (Milner, 2015, p.15). Fieldnotes and observational data captured incidents of power struggles occurring between the students and teachers at Brookshire Elementary.

Table 11
Cultural Differences Findings

Research Questions	Findings from Data
1. How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Differences are manifested by a breakdown in communication between teachers and students, which results in emotional, angry student outburst.

Lindsey, Terrell, and Nuri-Robins (2012) argue that barriers of resistance hinder teacher’s individual rate of change when dealing with issues of becoming culturally proficient. Becoming culturally competent is a process and many teachers struggle as was apparent over the course of this study. Some deal with issues of guilt, insecurity, or

shame. Mindy, the experienced teacher, expressed similar feelings the day after a Focus Group meeting,

“I did not sleep at all last night (sighs)... I thought and thought about what we discussed yesterday about being color-blind...(sighs) I feel bad, but I am not a bad person.”

My belief is that it is indeed exceedingly rare to find an educator who would not deny blatant racism today. “Often educators declare their commitment to culturally proficient practices, but balk when asked to make changes to their practice” (Lindsey, Terrell, & Nuri-Robins, 2012, p. 5). This was displayed first hand over the course of this study. Mindy, the experienced teacher of 12 plus years, struggled with issues of viewing the concept of being “color-blind” as a bad thing. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell (2012) exert that when educators struggle with “noticing or acknowledging the culture of others and ignoring the discrepant experiences of cultures within the school; treating everyone in the system the same way” that this is defined as cultural blindness. Over the course of this study, Mindy, the experienced teacher of twelve plus years experienced much angst centered around the Focus group discussions. She said in response to the question: Am I color-blind when it comes to my teaching?

“My answer is complicated, I am color-blind in the way that I love my students, but not in the way that I treat them,”

“I treat all of my students the same as I do my own children.” “I believe that all it takes is hard work.”

Again, Mindy’s reaction supports Milner’s (2015) myth of meritocracy which is when educators view their work through a meritocratic lens and mindset. A meritocratic mind

set is one in which teachers believe that “student performance is primarily and summarily a function of hard work, ability, skill, intelligence, and persistence” (Milner, 2015, p. 15). Educators, such as Mindy, can often fall into context-neutral mind set ways of viewing themselves as they relate to the students whom they teach. Furthermore, when educators “approach their work with students without understanding and attending to the nuances and idiosyncrasies inherent to their teaching environment” conflicts occur (Milner, 2015, p 15). Coming to grips with one’s belief, biases, and assumptions is a process and can cause moments of consternation as one moves along the continuum towards cultural competence. Additionally, “color-blind ideologies, orientations, and practices can make it difficult for educators to recognize disparities and dilemmas in education” (Milner, 2015, p. 22). Educators, as Mindy are challenged to “rethink persistent notions that they should avoid recognizing race and how race operates on individual and systemic levels in education” (Milner, 2015, p. 14). A color-blind mentality inevitably leads to conflicts.

Cultural conflicts were apparent at Brookshire Elementary school. It was noted in journal responses over the course of the study that conflicts between teachers and students appeared to be prevalent at Brookshire. Most conflicts were between White teachers and African-American students. Not all conflicts were between White teachers and African-American students; however, the majority observed were. Four out of the five Focus Group teachers responded that most of the explosive, disruptive, and troubling student outbursts occurring at Brookshire were a direct response of cultural differences between teacher and student. Ellie, a second-year classroom teacher responded by saying,

“Most teachers do not know how to deal with extremely disruptive students who have explosive anger and verbal and physical aggression.”

Another teacher, Kathy, responded by stating that she perceived that conflicts were occurring due to miscommunication. She concluded her response by stating,

“As a school, we have some cultural competence, we still have a long way to go as far as understanding the cultures and identifies of all our students, especially, the ones different from our own.”

“We cannot assume that because a student is African-American and his/her teacher is African-American that they are from the same culture.”

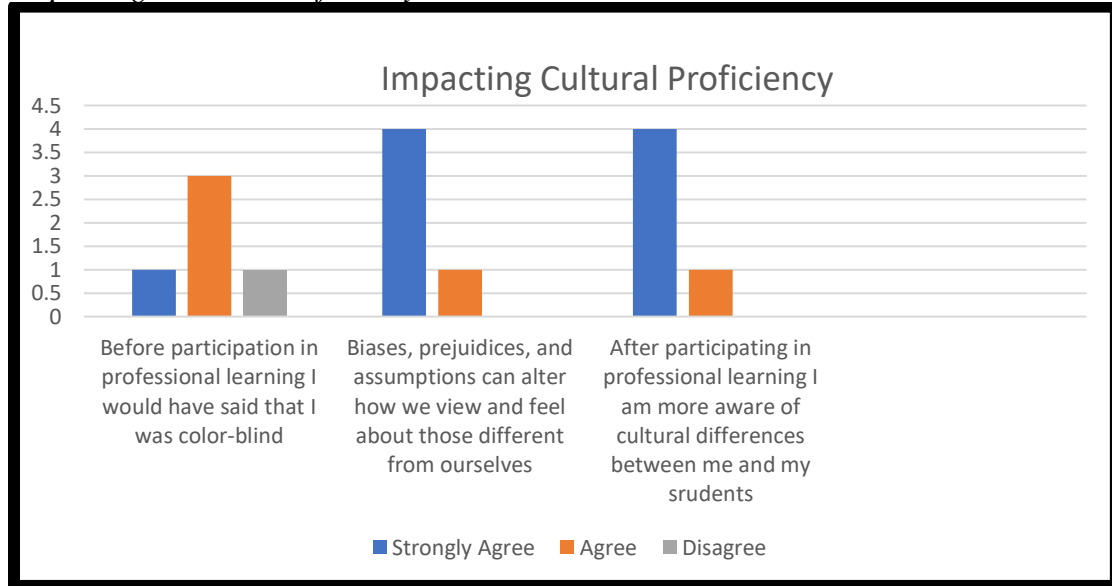
She concludes by stating,

“This applies to any race, and it is a dangerous assumption that can lead to misunderstanding the students and can inhibit their success.”

Impact of professional development on cultural proficiency

The Focus group audio-recording, AR participant interview, and post questionnaire data provided evidence that professional learning impacts cultural proficiency. Interview data, post questionnaire data, and Focus group discussion data supports this finding. Post questionnaire data below provides further evidence to the degree to which the professional development impacted teacher’s cultural proficiency (see Table 12). Lindsey, Terrell, and Nuri-Robins (2012) describe culture as groupness and ascertain that “cultural identity is what enables people to recognize where they belong” (p. 11). Ensuring that the Focus group participants gained a clear understanding was essential for this study so the discussion centered around identity was conducted over two meeting periods.

Table 12
Impacting Cultural Proficiency



Five out of five Focus Group participants agreed that identity has many characteristics and can affect relationships within school buildings and across classrooms. When asked on the post questionnaire what they had learned about identity and how it affects relationships, responses included:

“Identity is multi-faceted; It cannot be wrapped in a box labeled race or poverty.” “Many dynamics compose a person’s identity.”

“I believe that identity is very complex and that the discussion to understand how it is constructed should be approached with the understanding that we all have differences.”

Lindsey and Terrell (2009) remind us that “culture is real and is a major element in all human interaction” (p. xv). Understanding how one self -identifies is the first step toward gaining cultural competence. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the professional learning modules on teacher’s cultural proficiency, teachers were asked to

summarize what they learned about themselves after completing professional development on cultural proficiency. One Focus group member responded by stating,

“In my opinion, I consider myself to be a very open-minded person. I do have prejudices which I am aware of, but I try not to allow my prejudices to affect how I interact with people.”

Another participant response was, *“I am more culturally aware of the students I teach”*

All teachers indicated that they were more aware of the cultural differences between themselves and their students. Mindy, the experienced teacher who was a part of the Focus group commented the following,

“Regardless of what research says, I am an outlier.” “Even after professional development I am still color-blind when I relate to my students.” “Yes, I see their exterior characteristics, but this does not influence my approach.”

Becoming cultural proficient is a process and this study afforded me a firsthand demonstration of the stages through which one progresses towards cultural competence.

A detailed analysis of this process will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Table 13
Impact on Cultural Proficiency Findings

Research Questions	Findings from Data
2. How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers’ cultural proficiency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in cultural proficiency training made teachers more aware of the role of identity and its impact upon the students that they teach

An Action Research Team’s Findings

AR team audio recording data and AR team interview allowed me to gauge what was gleaned from working collaboratively with teachers on culturally responsive

instruction. A review of Focus group teacher Focus group data revealed that professional learning was beneficial for increasing teacher's cultural proficiency.

Table 14

What Does an Action Research Team Learn?

Research Questions	Findings from Data
3. What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Biases, perceptions, and assumptions can alter how educators view those different from ourselves. ▪ Professional development is needed for the teachers at Brookshire Elementary School ▪ Poverty is a factor in low student achievement at Brookshire Elementary School.

Michelle, a gifted and talented teacher, felt that there was a definite group of students at Brookshire Elementary who were operating on the margins of the school. She commented further,

“Their behavior is very disruptive and they can be seen walking along the walls, and knocking things down...getting into things”

“I think that there is a good mix of both male and female African-American students who stand out in this way”

Overall data generated from both Focus-Group and AR team meetings revealed that there are obviously cultural differences between students and teachers.

Michelle, *“I think this is where a lot of our student's frustration comes from”*

She continued by saying, *“the teacher's view is one way (hesitates)...now, and I could be*

biased, but... “I think this is where a lot of the conflicts come from”

“Our students may feel that the teachers do not understand them.” “for example, cannot relate to. where they come from.” “So, they build up walls” “Our mission and goals should be to break down that wall, and get to know them!”

Summary

This action research study revealed a direct correlation between teachers’ cultural understanding and their views and feelings about their students. Several over-arching themes were yielded from the data generated by interviews, audio-recorded discussions, and field notes from observations conducted over the course of the nine months action research case study.

Theme #1: Brookshire Elementary School staff can benefit from cultural proficiency professional development.

Theme#2: Cultural conflict between teachers and students is manifested by physical and verbal student aggression.

Theme #3: Poverty may be a contributing factor to the cultural dissonance occurring between teachers and students at Brookshire Elementary School.

The conclusions and implications for further study will be discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This action research case study explored the impact of cultural proficiency training on teacher's attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. The questions guiding this case study were as follows: (1) How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school? (2) How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers' cultural proficiency? (3) What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction? This chapter includes an analysis, conclusions, and implications for further research. Chapter 6 begins with an analysis of the research findings followed by conclusions drawn from this case study. Finally, a discussion of implications for existing and future research is discussed.

Analysis

This study uncovered three major findings directly related to the impact of cultural proficiency professional development on teachers' bias, perceptions, and prejudices at Brookshire Elementary School. Interview data, questionnaire responses, observation data, and audio-recordings of Focus group and AR participant data contributed to the findings discussed. Data is organized and discussed by research questions presented in greater detail in Chapter five. Analyzed data supports the need for cultural proficiency training for the staff at Brookshire Elementary. Based on teacher

interviews, discussion meetings data, and observational data, a lack of cultural proficiency on the part of teachers is contributing to conflicts between teachers and students. Additional factors may be contributing to the overt displays of student aggression occurring at Brookshire Elementary; however, additional research would need to be conducted for possible causes. Focus group data suggest that a color-blind mind set and poverty may be underlying factors contributing to the breakdown in communication between students and teachers at Brookshire. “Teachers with a color-blind mind-set may not recognize how their own race and racial experiences shape what they teach” (Milner, 2015, p. 17). Milner (2015) asserts that when teachers have the same racial background as their students then there are more opportunities for teachers and students to connect. Race is a factor in this instance and should be considered, however, having the same racial background as students is not sufficient without knowledge and skill (Milner, 2015). “Gay asserts that even if students and teachers are the same race, it “may be potentially beneficial, but it is not a guarantee of pedagogical effectiveness” (Milner, 2015, p. 19). I found this to be the case over the course of this case study. African-America participants also commented on a failure to connect with a segment of the school population. Data suggest that four cultures may be attempting to cohabitate among the teachers and students at Brookshire: a Hispanic culture, a middle-class culture, an African-American culture, and finally a culture of poverty; however, further research would be needed to substantiate this theory.

“Undoubtedly, poverty has deep-seated influences on the way students experience school” (Howard, 2010, p. 3). Teachers often experience feelings of helplessness and frustration when faced with overwhelming student needs which in many instances are

direct results of large-scale social and economic factors. Therefore, “providing practitioners with a knowledge base, as well as practical reference and skills” is paramount (Howard, 2010, p. 3).

Conclusions

This study’s aim was to explore the impact of cultural proficiency training on teacher’s attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. The following guiding questions directed the study: (1) How are cultural differences between teachers and students manifested at Brookshire Elementary school? (2) How does participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies impact teachers’ cultural proficiency? (3) What does an action research team learn from collaborative work with teachers on culturally responsive instruction?

Cultural Proficiency Theory was one theoretical lens through which I elected to analyze and ultimately guide this study. Culturally proficient teachers have a deeper understanding of how they can connect and relate to students of different races.

Milner’s (2010) Diversity and Opportunity Gaps framework covers five interconnected areas and was used as the conceptual framework for this action research case study:

(1) “rejection of colorblindness; (2) ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend cultural conflicts; (3) ability to understand how meritocracy operates; (4) ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mind-sets; and (5) rejection of context-neutral mind-sets and practices” (p. 14). Becoming culturally proficient is a process which occurs over time. First, it begins with the rejection of color blindness and developing an understanding of identity. The participants who could move along the

continuum towards cultural proficiency reported having gained a deeper understanding of how their biases, prejudices, and assumptions impacted their students.

Second, cultural proficiency is the ability to understand and work through cultural conflicts. Mindy, the experienced Focus group participant, experienced much discord within herself and with the idea that being color-blind was not a “good thing.” Not being able to work past this hindered her ability to understand how meritocracy worked and to shift her thinking from a context-neutral mindset way of viewing her practice.

Third, the ability to understand how meritocracy operates. This was revealed in the following participant response, “*My belief is that all students should be treated equally.*” Fourth, low-expectations and the development of a deficit mind-set is possible which can result in underachievement. Finally, when one fails to consider the social context in which one is teaching it becomes impossible to capitalize on the inherent resources students naturally bring to the learning environment.

Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning closely aligns with Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell’s (2009) Theory of Cultural Proficiency and is a reminder that as adults we have an “acquired coherent body of experiences—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define how we view the world” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). When we fail to become critically reflective of our own assumptions, underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings, according to Mezirow (1997), we become desensitized to the effects of poverty and the role that it plays in gaining a cultural understanding of those students who are unlike us.

The theoretical framework below provides a visual representation for the addressing the phenomena occurring at Brookshire Elementary. This study demonstrated

that when teachers willingly examine their biases, beliefs, underlying assumptions, and perceptions that they would experience a change in mind-set, thus increasing culturally proficiency over time.

Implications

This study has a direct impact on the educational leaders at Brookshire Elementary and throughout the Williams County School District. Being able to witness the process towards becoming culturally competent by a small group of teachers was powerful. Issues such as race, culture, biases, prejudices, and assumptions are typically taboo topics and rarely discuss in educational settings. Teaching and learning are intricately interwoven with self-identification. This study's findings as well as works by Lindsey, Terrell, and Nuri-Robins are essential as they serve as "lenses for understanding classroom interactions and are guidelines for assessing engagement with one's colleagues, students, and communities.

Increasing diversity within today's classrooms has erected formidable barriers, and made teaching students a challenge for teachers and school leaders. This study shows a direct relationship between participation in professional development on culturally responsive instructional strategies and increased teachers' cultural proficiency. Research supports the argument that culturally proficient teachers are better equipped to handle twenty first century learners. The need for educators who are culturally proficient will increase as our nation's schools grow more diverse. Current trends show the future work force of educators becoming "Whiter" and schools such as Brookshire Elementary to experience cultural conflicts between teachers and students. Additionally, this study

substantiates and adds to bodies of research conducted about the importance of culture as it relates to teacher assumptions and student perception.

Next Steps

This study reflects a definite need for the use of cultural proficiency as a tool for addressing the cultural conflicts occurring at Brookshire Elementary school. Lindsey and Terrell (2012) propose collaboration to give value to diversity within ones organization. Collaborative professional development on what it means to be culturally competent would serve the Brookshire staff well. This study supports the need to explore further the issue of poverty as it relates to student discipline at Brookshire. Findings from this study suggest that it would be beneficial to explore causes for power struggles between students of color within all William's County schools.

Summary

This study depicted how becoming culturally competent is a process which occurs over time, but possible. Thoughts expressed by a second-year teacher to an experienced teacher, during a tense discussion about colorblindness,

"For me culture does affect the way that I teach. If I know the kind of culture that the kids are coming from then I know how to relate to them."

"So, I feel if you (nods towards experienced teacher) say that you are color-blind then... to me that means that you view everybody thru my lens."

"Like, if I am color-blind then the only way that I can view people is thru my White perception," ... So, if I teach knowing that this is a class mostly full of kids that have a different cultural lens than I do... then I teach them differently,"

Findings from this study have implications for not only the Brookshire staff, but

for schools across the nation. Low-income Hispanic and African-American children in our largest urban and suburban cities are not acquiring the high levels of academic skills necessary to access a quality education (Lindsey & Terrell, 2009). The implications for the Williams County's School District are paramount. This action research study indicates that professional learning to facilitate cultural proficiency has the potential to influence teacher biases, assumptions, and prejudices. School districts should consider this to be implemented district-wide as a tool for increasing student achievement. Additionally, the need for teachers to adopt context-neutral mindsets which allows them to recognize the realities embedded in a place or school such as Brookshire, is equally important (Milner, 2015). Moreover, findings add to the bodies of research on multi cultural education and its benefits for improving race relations and helping all students "acquire the knowledge, and skills needed in cross-cultural interactions" (Howard, 1999, p, ix). It is essential that educational leaders understand that "culture can be understood and that powerful pedagogy is within the grasp of well-prepared teachers" (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Culture matters- and we [educators] cannot teach what we do not understand and acknowledge. Educational leaders blind to cultural diversity are blind to reality.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, M. (2011). Teacher & Student Perspectives on Cultural Proficiency. *Leadership*, 40(5), 32-35.
- Barongan, C. (2006). Review of a comprehensive approach to multicultural competence: A review of race, culture, psychology, and law. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(1), 169-171. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.12.1.169.
- Bennett, C. I. (1999). Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a Conceptual Framework of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An Overview of the Conceptual and Theoretical Literature, 65.
- Bui, Y. N., & Fagan, Y. M. (2013). The effects of an integrated reading comprehension strategy: A culturally responsive teaching approach for fifth-grade students' reading comprehension. *Preventing School Failure*, 57(2), 59-69. doi: 10.1080/1045988X.2012.664581.
- Coghlan, D. (2007). Insider action research doctorates: Generating actionable knowledge. *Higher Education*, 54(2), 293-306. doi: 10.1007/s10734-005-5450-0.
- Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2005). *Doing action research in your own organization*.

London: Sage Publications.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 95–120.

Cross, T. L., Georgetown Univ. Child Development Center, W. D. C. C. T. A. C., et al. (1989). *Towards a culturally competent system of care: A monograph on effective services for minority children who are severely emotionally disturbed*. Retrieved from [http://proxy.remote.galib.uga.edu/login?URL= Ghosh](http://proxy.remote.galib.uga.edu/login?URL=Ghosh).

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Routledge.

Gay, G. (2002). *Preparing for culturally responsive teaching*. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Georgia.gov. (2014). *The governor's office of student achievement: Report card*. Retrieved August 19, 2015 from <http://gosa.georgia.gov/report-card>.

Ghosh, A. (2014). Culturally competent behaviors at workplace: An intergroup perspective for workplace diversity. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 21(3), 73-95.

Howard, T. C. (2001). Telling their side of the story: African-American students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching. *Urban Review*, 33(2), 131.

Hoy, W. K., & Miskel, C. G. (2013). Educational administration: *Theory, research, and practice*, 9th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Irving, Debby. (2014). *Waking up white: and finding myself in the story of race*. Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press.
- Johnson, R., & Bush, L. (2005). Leading the school through culturally responsive inquiry. *The Sage handbook of educational leadership: Advances in theory, research, and practice*, 269.
- King, K. A., Artiles, A. J., & Kozleski, E. B. (2009). *Professional learning for culturally responsive teaching*. Retrieved from: XXX June, 24, 2009.
- Ladson-Billings, G (1994) The dreamkeepers: Successful teaching for African-American students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy, 159.
- Ladson- Billings, G. J. (2006). “Your blues ain’t like mine”: Keeping issues of race and racism on the multicultural agenda. *Theory into Practice*, 35(4), 248– 255.
- Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K. N., & Terrell, R. D. (2009). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Mandinach, E. B., & Jackson, S. S. (2012). Transforming teaching and learning through data driven decision making. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Mahmood, K. (2015). Social capital: From concept to theory. *Pakistan Journal of Science*, 67(1), 114-119.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Meece, D., & Wingate, K. O. K. (2010). Providing early childhood teachers with opportunities to understand diversity and the achievement gap. *SRATE Journal*, 19(1), 36-43.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 1997(74), 5-12.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Milner, H. R. I. V. (2010). *Start Where You Are, but Don't Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classrooms*: Harvard Education Press.
- Mugisha, V. M. (2013). Culturally responsive instructional leadership: A conceptual exploration with principals of three New Zealand mainstream schools. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 15(2), 1-20.
- Reardon, S.F., & Galindo, C. (2009). The hispanic-white achievement gap in math and reading in the elementary grades. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 853-891.
- Schmeichel, M. (2012). Good teaching? An examination of culturally relevant pedagogy as an equity practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 44(2), 211-231. doi: 10.1080/00220272.2011.591434.
- Sheets, H. R. (2005). *Diversity pedagogy: Examining the role of culture in the teaching-learning process*. New York, NY: Pearson.

- Sleeter, C. E. (2011). An agenda to strengthen culturally responsive pedagogy. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(2), 7-23.
- Smyth, H. (2013). What Does Research Say About the Effectiveness of Professional Learning and Development for Culturally Responsive Teaching at Primary School Level? *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, 10(1), 169-188.
- Sobel, D. M., Gutierrez, C., Zion, S., & Blanchett, W. (2011). Deepening culturally responsive understandings within a teacher preparation program: It's a process. *Teacher Development*, 15(4), 435-452. doi:10.1080/13664530.2011.635526.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial micro aggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education*, 69, 60-73.
- Sorenson, R. D., Goldsmith, L. M., Méndez, Z. Y., & Maxwell, K. T. (2011). *The principal 's guide to curriculum leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, A SAGE Company.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 1-40.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth & Society*, 43(3), 1066-1109. doi:10.1177/0044118X10382877.
- Terrell, R. D., & Lindsey, R. B. (2009). *Culturally proficient leadership: The personal journey begins within*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

- Thompson, J., & Byrnes, D. (2011). A more diverse circle of friends. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 13(2), 93-99.
- Tornatzky, L. (1982). *Creating effective schools: An in-service program for enhancing school learning climate and achievement*. Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications.
- Ukpokodu, O. N. (2004). The impact of shadowing culturally different students on preservice teachers' disposition toward diversity. *Multicultural Education*, 12(2), 19-28.
- Valencia, R. R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice- The Stanford Series on Education and Public Policy*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Vera-Toscano, E., Garrido-Fernández, F., Gómez-Limón, J., & Cañadas-Reche, J. (2013). Are Theories About Social Capital Empirically Supported? Evidence from the Farming Sector. *Social Indicators Research*, 114(3), 1331-1359.
doi:10.1007/s11205-012-0205-7.
- Vorhaus, J. (2014). Function and Functional Explanation in Social Capital Theory: A Philosophical Appraisal. *Studies in Philosophy & Education*, 33(2), 185.
doi:10.1007/s11217-013-9380-5.
- Yu, T. (2012). "What Is It That I Don't Know". *Multicultural Education*, 19(4), 47-52.

Appendix A-Recruitment Advertisement Template

Dear Study Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Karen Bryant in the Department of Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled Exploring the Reading Achievement Gap between African-American and Hispanic Students: A Case for Action Research. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore whether cultural proficiency training impacts teacher attitude, perceptions, and beliefs about the learning abilities of Hispanic and African-American students in a historically suburban community school setting.

You're eligible to be in this study because you are a teacher at Fowler Drive Elementary School and over 18 years of age.

Your participation will involve participating in five 30-45-minute focus group discussions to examine reading achievement data and to explore possible barriers to reading achievement for African-American learners and completing a brief 2 to 3-minute questionnaire. In addition, you may be asked to help develop interventions and professional development to cultivate cultural proficiency.

This action research study is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2016. Teacher questionnaires will be administered in August of 2016. While the official study will end in March of 2017, the goal is for sustainable changed practice. Participating in the study is strictly voluntary and subjects will not be paid.

If you would like additional information about this study, please feel free to call me at (706) 254-2911 or send an e-mail to bns38660@uga.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Barbara Sims

Appendix B-Consent Form

Exploring the Reading Achievement Gap between African-American and Hispanic Students: A Case for Action Research

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Bryant
Educational Administration and Policy
bryantkc@uga.edu

Co-Principal Investigator: Barbara Nell Sims
bns38660@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore whether cultural proficiency training impacts teacher attitude, perceptions, and beliefs about the learning abilities of Hispanic and African-American students in a historically suburban community school setting.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- Participate in five 30-45-minute focus group discussions to examine cultural proficiency and tolerance and its impact on student achievement.
- Help to develop interventions and professional development to cultivate cultural proficiency.
- Complete brief 2 to 3-minute questionnaire.
- This action research study is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2016. Teacher questionnaires will be distributed September of 2016. While the official study will end in March of 2017; the goal is for sustainable changed practice.

Risks and discomforts

The researchers do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits

- Anticipated benefits of participating in this action research project are increased cultural proficiency of Fowler staff. Increase cultural proficiency of teachers, will result in deeper understanding of how to meet needs of diverse learners and increased reading achievement of African-American learners.
- The expected benefit to the field of education is strengthening of teachers' cultural proficiency which may result in increased student achievement.

Incentives for participation

Participants will not receive any compensation for participating in this action research project.

Audio Recording

Audio recording devices will be used to maintain accurate documentation of conversations held during focus group discussions. Transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the research. Sensitive materials will not be a topic of discussion in the focus group. To participate in this study, you must agree to audio-recording.

Privacy/Confidentiality

All data obtained from the study will be collected anonymously. Information obtained during focus group discussions will not be associated with any individual, but instead will be compiled in summary form. The researcher will emphasize that all comments made during the course of the focus group be kept strictly confidential; however, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is strictly voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate will not have any adverse effects upon your performance evaluation.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information that can be identified as yours.

If you have questions

The principal investigator conducting this study is Dr. Karen Bryant, an assistant professor at the University of Georgia. The Co-Principal investigator is Barbara Sims, an Athens, Clarke county teacher. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have

questions later, you may contact Dr. Bryant at 706-542-1539 or bryantkc@uga.edu. Barbara Sims can be reached at 706-254-2911 or barbara.sims.25@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix C-Theory of Change Plan

Current Situation	Enabling Factors /Barriers	Processes and Activities	Desired Outcomes	Long-term Goals
Disproportionality in reading scores between Hispanic and African-American learners in a historically urban community school setting.	<p>How to engage a group of educators to become more culturally responsive</p> <p>Cultural differences between teachers and students</p> <p>Lack of (CRI) Culturally Responsive Instructional practices</p>	<p>Development of professional Learning to provide teachers with training on (CRI) culturally responsive instruction.</p> <p>Development of teacher inquiry based professional learning to study cultural competency</p>	By using culturally responsive teaching practices integrated into elementary teaching the disproportionality in reading and math scores between Hispanic and African-American learners will decrease.	Continuous professional learning that equips teachers and administrators in the use of culturally proficient leadership and instructional practices

What I am striving to represent in this model is as teachers increase their cultural competence the they will be better equipped to deal with children of color, which will lead them to using more Culturally Responsive Instructional Practices which will address the disproportionality in reading scores between Hispanic and African-American students at Brookshire Elementary.

Appendix D-Logic Model

