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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

The Effects of Teacher Perceptions and Expectations on Student Achievement

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Mary E. Contreras

Committee in Charge:

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Professor Patricia Stall, Chair
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University of California, San Diego

Professor Carolyn Huie Hofstetter

2011

The Dissertation of Mary E. Contreras is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and

form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2011

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the students who have suffered and continue to suffer within our educational systems. It is dedicated to those educators who open their hearts and minds to students can be and will be successful in their classroom.

I want to acknowledge my Chair, Professor Patricia Stall, who believes that education should be and can be transformative. I want to thank my husband, Chuck Contreras, and my son, Ducote Contreras, who have always stood by me and believed in me. Without their support and love, I would not be the person and educator I am today.

EPIGRAPH

"The risk for our children in school is not a risk associated with their intelligence. Our failures have nothing to do with IQ, nothing to do with poverty, nothing to do with race, nothing to do with style, nothing to do with the need to discover new pedagogy. We have one and only one problem: Do we truly will to see each and every child in this nation develop to the peak of his or her capacities? The highest goals we can imagine are well within reach for those who have the will to excellence."

Asa Hilliard

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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Effects of Teacher Perceptions and Expectations on Student Achievement

by

Mary E. Contreras

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2011

California State University, San Marcos, 2011

Professor Patricia Stall, Chair

The achievement gap, the disparity in the academic performance of students, especially in groups of minority students and students of low socioeconomic status in relation to the academic performance of their peers (Abramson, 2006), has been a

disturbing reality of our education system since public education's inception in the 1800s. Neither the legal sanctions of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 nor the more recent 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have had the intended impact on closing the achievement gap.

A primary barrier to the change necessary for improving education is the low expectations teachers often have toward certain groups of students (Allen, 1999). The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions and expectations of their Hispanic students.

In this qualitative study, transcripts of dialogue from conversations held in professional learning communities were analyzed to discern underlying teachers' beliefs about the majority Hispanic students attending the Arts Magnet K-8 public school. The study found that teachers do have particular perceptions and expectations for their Hispanic students. The researcher also discovered that conversations around race are difficult. The implication is that in order to bring about systemic change in the educational system, educators must acknowledge and be willing to address that their perceptions and expectations can impact a student's academic achievement.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Does race matter in education today? The answer to that question can be seen in our classrooms; on educational tests, both within the content and in the results; in the media; and in legislation. Yes, race does indeed continue to matter in our schools and throughout our educational system. This was further evidenced by a recent article in the Saturday, January 8, 2011 issue of the *San Diego Union Tribune* titled "Arizona to End Latino School Program: Mexican-American Classes Declared Illegal by State But Not Similar Black or Asian Courses." The article writes about Tucson High Magnet school in the Tucson Unified School District which offered a Latino Literature class. The program was declared illegal by the state of Arizona even though similar programs for African American, Asian, and American Indian students are allowed to continue. The article goes on to state that Arizona's Attorney General, Tom Horne, declared the program in violation of state law that went into effect on January 1. One of the issues with the class were the texts being used; such as, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Occupied American, which Horne is quoted as saying, 'inappropriately teach Latino youths that they're being mistreated."

The educational system is undoubtedly under the scrutiny of the public, the media, and legislation.

School reform efforts have not always been successful or sustainable as evidenced by the continuing achievement gap between groups of students. The disparity in the academic performance of students, especially in groups of minority

students and students of low socioeconomic status, in relation to the academic

performance of their peers, is known as the achievement gap (Abramson, 2006). The

aim of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation was to improve the

performance of public schools by increasing accountability standards. Even with this

rigid accountability system aimed at providing better education, the achievement gap

persists (Abramson). "All subgroups of students have, in general, improved as

measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. But disparities related

to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status remain" (Barton & Coley, 2010).

Little (1994) argues that it is in our professional development practices of

training, rather than problem solving, that results in failed reform and change efforts.

Teachers need to be given the opportunity and time to collectively study classroom

practices in order for systemic change to occur (Little). "Although there are social and

economic explanations of failure of low SES students, ultimate success and failure

may be significantly affected by differing personal beliefs about learning among

students and teachers" (Schullo & Alperson,1998). Teachers must not only have the

time to study classroom practices but also confront their perceptions of their students'

academic ability.

Professional Learning Communities can provide an opportunity for educators

to collaborate, to be more reflective about their practice, to question their

methodologies, to confront their perceptions and beliefs and to share best practices.

These learning communities can promote problem solving among teachers, who can

then work collaboratively to reflect on and to question their practice in order to

improve student achievement. There is evidence that shows that if teachers collaboratively analyze student work there will be benefits for teaching and learning (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafka, 2003). The same could be said to be true for analyzing teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward their students. Numerous studies (Akey, 2006; Cammarota, 2007; Chaiken, Sigler, & Derlega, 1974; Ferguson, 1998; Konstantopoulos, 2006; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1966) have documented the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement. An analysis of student achievement data and the effects of teacher perceptions can become the focus for professional learning communities. Professional learning communities can be a model for professional development and learning, and the vehicle by which change and school reform occur and for the achievement gap to be closed. The purpose of this study was to determine through conversations in professional learning communities, the extent to which teachers were aware of their biases as related to their expectations of their Latino students and in turn focus on changing their behavior as related to these expectations. Though not measured in this study, the premise that more positive teacher expectations have a direct impact upon student achievement was a primary impetus for beginning these conversations in the professional learning communities.

Defining the Achievement Gap

The disparity in the academic performance of students, especially in groups of minority students and students of low socioeconomic status, is known as the achievement gap (Abramson, 2006).This gap has existed for more than 50 years and is

defined by educational assessments, standardized tests, grade point averages, dropout rates, college enrollment rates, and college completion rates. The gap's stark reality is revealed in the reading and mathematic test scores and abilities of students. Generally by the eighth grade, African American and Hispanic students across the nation have tested three years behind other students. There is a disproportionately high dropout rate for Hispanic and African American teens; however, if they reach the 12th grade, they are generally four years behind their White peers (Educational Trust, 2004). According to studies conducted by Educational Trust that controlled for social background, the Black-White test score gap narrowed from 1974 to 1998, which is prior to the implementation of NCLB. "All subgroups of students have, in general, improved as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). But disparities related to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status remain" (Barton & Coley, 2010). Despite slight improvement at the end of the 20th century the gap has widened again since the advent of NCLB.

> New data shows that changes in education policy have not eliminated the gap between test scores of white and affluent kids compared to their classmates. One research group says that education reforms started to narrow the gap in the 1990's, but it finds that the efforts have stalled. It also says federal programs are having no effect. (Abramson, p. 1)

It will take more than policy or federal and state mandated programs to bring an end to the achievement gap.

Historical Perspective on the Achievement Gap

Historically, segregation by race and ethnicity was commonplace in schools throughout the United States. As far back as 1896, in the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, separate educational facilities were deemed "equal" and were not a violation of the 14th Amendment. It was not until 1945 when five Mexican American families fought school segregation in California school districts (Westminister, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and El Modena) that it became an issue that created change in policy and practice. The *Mendez v. Westminister* case brought to public awareness the segregation that was occurring in California's educational system. In 1946, the court ruled in favor of the families but it was another year before California Governor Earl Warren signed into law a repeal to end all school segregation statutes that existed in the California Education Code.

Seven years later, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the United States Supreme Court deemed that school segregation throughout the United States was unconstitutional. *Brown v. Board of Education* established that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" because Black youth were placed in schools with inferior teachers, supplies, and equipment. Yet, in spite of this decision, there was still resistance to interpretation in Southern states through the 1960s.

Although improvement in the achievement gap was documented in the 1980s (Haycock, 2006), by the end of the 80s the gap had again widened. As a result of this continuing and growing disparity among students' academic achievements, researchers and the public were critically scrutinizing the K-12 educational system. It was in this environment in 2002 that the federal government reauthorized the

elementary and secondary education act, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which requires that all students of all groups will perform at grade level on all tests, and show continual improvement from year to year, or schools and districts will face state and possibly federal sanctions. States have created and disseminated standards in the primary subjects, along with state assessments. This standards-based education reform is aimed at improving school performance and accountability. However, the manner in which the standards and student achievement are assessed is narrowly prescribed by NCLB, which considers only standardized achievement tests as valid instruments. Legitimacy of such standardized tests because of test content cultural biases has been questioned by researchers (Ferguson, 1998, p. 274).

Much of the earlier approaches to understanding culture and race in connection to learning were steeped in the discriminatory philosophies of the times and were used to explain differences on IQ tests and achievement by attributing these differences to cultural and biological factors. The biological models of deficiency were then replaced by cultural deficit models; minority students were no longer defined as biologically disadvantaged but instead as culturally disadvantaged (poverty and environments lacking in cognitive stimulation). Programs like Head Start began to combat this "reality." This culture of poverty paradigm continues to be the popular explanation for differences in achievement among groups, as seen with the popularity of *The Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne. Authors and researchers explain the achievement gap for minority groups based upon minorities as "different

learners" with different communication and interaction styles than White students.

However, in research presented in Canada in 1999, Allen states,

> Academic achievement is not so much about cognitive abilities or
> skills acquisition as it is about how the white territorial practices of
> teachers and others at a school create alienation, resistance, and
> community membership. Unfortunately, schools do not provide the
> kind of democratic education that is inclusive of historically
> disenfranchised students, mainly because of the territoriality of
> Whiteness. (Allen, 1999)

Schools must provide an equitable education for all students.

Sociocultural/Constructivism Theory

Some theorists believe that culture—and this would include the culture of

education—has been carried through and across generations as well as created within

local and historical context. The work of Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist in the early

1900s, concentrated on the idea that development occurred simultaneously on multiple

levels. Vygotsky identified four planes of development; however, for the sake of this

study, I will focus only on the cultural/historical change plane. This level of

development focuses on the changes in social structure, cultural norms, and historical

change. Using this theory, some have argued that "individual classrooms and students

are the wrong place to look for explanations of or to redress minority student

achievement" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 475). Perhaps then the lower achievement

levels of these students can and should be attributed to the society that structures

access to resources differentially and purposely for certain members of its society and

not for others. If society does not change, school organizations will remain a reflection

of our racially divided society. Sociocultural theorists—such as Lev Vygotsky—have

assumed that social and cultural processes are central to understanding learning and

development of all students. However, they do not include discussion about race and

power and how this impacts students' learning (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2005).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theorists (Darder & Torres, 2000; Freire, 2007; Giroux, 1985) will

contend that the lower achievement of minority students will not change until issues of

racism within our society and organizations is addressed—similar to the sociocultural

theorists' stance. Schools are just a reflection of our racist societal structures. Critical

race theory differs from sociocultural theory in that it purposefully looks only at issues

of race and even argues that the goal of education in the United States has been to

maintain our class system and the power structure in our society. Individual students'

failure—primarily minority and low-income students—has been created by our society

because of our current distribution of cultural capital and not by an individual's

shortcomings. Thus, some kinds of cultural capital—most often associated with

middle- and upper-class values and culture—have a higher leverage of success within

our educational system. In the current system we have, there can be no success of

some students without the failure of others. This is the way the system and our culture

have been created—this is especially true in our grade-based and assessment system in

our schools—according to critical race theorists.

On a positive note within this theory, our schools could be the place where the

transformation of our cultures and society could occur. Social structure and power

play a critical role in our educational system. This is important to be aware of if we want to understand and address the achievement gap occurring in our schools. There can be little doubt that teachers and the social systems of schools have a direct impact upon student achievement.

Teacher and School Contributions to the Achievement Gap

As far back as the 1930s, researchers claimed that the education system used standardized tests to standardize student performance (Cammarota, 2007; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). Even today, test scores are still creating a gap among students and setting up further labeling (California State Testing assessment bands: Far Below Basic, Below Basic, Basic, Proficient and Advanced) among students. According to Konstantopoulos (2006), schools today are more diverse (the differences among them are greater) and at the same time more segregated than they were in the 70s. More variation in student achievement lies *within* schools than among schools (Konstantopoulos). It is the teacher and the teacher's practice and values that have the biggest impact on student achievement (Haycock, 2006; Konstantopoulos, 2006). Teacher support, clear and consistent expectations of behavior, and student engagement significantly related to levels of perceived academic competence (Akey, 2006).

In most schools White students are placed into more challenging courses and curriculum at higher percentages than African American and Hispanic students. This has been an educational trend and inequity since the 1950s; minority and low-income

students are tracked into remedial courses and special education classes at higher rates than White students. This phenomenon persists even with those who are outperforming their White counterparts on standardized testing (Abramson, 2006; Kober, 2001; McNeil, et al, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Because teachers with more experience and expertise tend to teach the honors and advanced placement courses where White students are tracked, minority students are often taught by teachers with less experience who focus on rote learning rather than rich dialogue, inquiry, and problem-solving. Higher order thinking skills are often reserved for the more challenging courses on campuses —promoting the thinking, learning, and understanding of students in these courses at higher rates than their counterparts in less challenging courses, which has created and continues to contribute to the ongoing achievement gap across our nation (Barton & Coley, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Mathews, 2007).

Data collected from California high schools and presented to the California Senate Standing Committee on Education in 2002 contends that rigorous and challenging work must be the experience of every high school student, or all high school students will not have success in college or the workplace (Ali, 2002). Many researchers note that students who enroll in more rigorous course work improve their skills overall and have greater success and persistence in college; yet, there continues to be barriers to access honors and Advanced Placement courses for African American and Hispanic students (Ali, 2002; Haycock, 2006; Konstantopoulos, 2006).

Across the nation, only about two-thirds of college-eligible students go on to some form of postsecondary education (Ali, 2002). The achievement gap is also revealed in the groups of students attending postsecondary institutions as well as the groups who are staying in these institutions and graduating with a degree. Those who do go on to pursue a postsecondary education rarely leave college with a degree. Many drop out during or after their first year of college. These statistics are even bleaker for Hispanic and African American students (Abramson, 2006; Education Trust, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

Teacher Perceptions and Student Academic Performance

It has been argued that the educational system (its structure, testing, and accountability measures) is inherently racist and as a result has created the achievement gap (Cammarota, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ferguson, 1998). Social constructivists will argue that teachers' cultural assumptions and social beliefs have influenced their practice and, thus, the ability of their students. Without critical reflection and scrutiny, the educational system will continue to perpetuate its inequities.

As far back as 1911, researchers were examining what would become known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. If we expect something to happen, our expectation and resulting behaviors will tend to make it so. This concept of self-fulfilling prophecy was brought to scientific research by psychologist Pfungst in 1911 with the Clever Hans case. Stomping the answers with its hoof, a horse named Clever Hans (Rosenthal

& Jacobson, 1966) seemed able to read, spell, and solve mathematical problems. However, after careful study, Pfungst was able to determine that the horse was reacting to inadvertent positive cues given by the people who would present a question to the horse. This was one of the first studies to suggest that an individual can control and even create a situation based on that individual's biases and expectations. In 1948. Robert Merton published an essay describing the self-fulfilling prophecy as a three-stage process. The first stage entails the person's belief that an event will occur in the future. In the second stage, this belief or expectation leads to a new behavior, which would not have occurred without the new belief. In the last stage, the expected event occurs, thus fulfilling the "prophecy" (Merton, 1948, p. 195). Without necessarily realizing it, we can create the results we expect. This even came to be known as "experimenter expectancy effect," which can invalidate psychological experiments.

In 1963, Robert Rosenthal studied this effect in order to determine how a researcher or experimenter might unknowingly influence the outcome of his/her research. Rosenthal was also concerned with how biases and expectancies might also occur in school classrooms. Rosenthal came to refer to this effect in settings outside of laboratories as the Pygmalion effect. From Greek mythology, Pygmalion, a sculptor, fell in love with his own sculpture of a woman. George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion," which is more widely known for its musical version "My Fair Lady," further expanded upon the effects of a teacher's expectations on his student. Rosenthal did much of his research on this methodological issue. In 1966, Rosenthal and Jacobson reported on a study conducted by researcher Flanagan involving 18

classrooms. "An average of 20% of the children were reported to classroom teachers as showing unusual potential for intellectual gains. Eight months later these "unusual" children (who had actually been selected at random) showed significantly greater gains in IQ than did the remaining children in the control group" (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968, p. 85). This study seemed to prove that teachers' expectations can influence and impact children's achievement. When teachers expected that certain children would show greater intellectual development, those children did show greater intellectual development" (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, p. 85).

"My bottom line conclusion is that teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors probably do help to sustain, and perhaps even expand, the black-white test score gap" (Ferguson, 1998, p. 313). Other studies have supported this correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement as well (Beyerbach et al. 2008; Good & Brophy, 1987; Grayson & Martin, 1997). The potentially long-lasting effects of teachers' expectations on student achievement are also of importance in these studies. When teachers unconsciously communicate their higher expectations to those students whom they believe possess the greater potential, they are impacting not only those students but the other students who are getting the reverse treatment and cues. Another study (Andrews, Wisniewski, & Mulick, 1997) documented how teachers referred more African American children, especially boys, to their school psychologist for testing and counseling than they did their Caucasian students. The study, using Rosenthal's expectancy theory and research, determined that the teachers' expectancies were the cause of the majority of referrals, not actual student differences

or need. Thus, if a teacher expects that a student doesn't need help or will do well, the student is likely to do well; if a teacher expects a student to fail, they will probably fail. It is awareness of such behavior and expectations that will beget change. The focus and work of professional learning communities must help to heighten teacher awareness in order for schoolwide change to begin and be sustainable.

Professional Learning Communities as a Reform Strategy for Closing the Gap

Many educational practices and systemic policies must change in order to close the achievement gap and to ensure equality and equity for all students. It is to our nation's benefit that educators talk of academic achievement and failure with words that denote their communal responsibility. "If principals devote less time to supervision of teaching and more time to working collaboratively with teams in examining evidence of student learning and strategies for improving on those results, they will be far more likely to fulfill their primary responsibility of helping more students learn at higher levels" (DuFour & Marzano, 2009). Margaret Wheatley (2005), in her foreword to *The World Café,* writes, "Through our conversations, as we work together, we discover a greater wisdom that reveals our path forward" (p. xxi). It is through conversation with their peers that educators will find answers in the collective wisdom. These focused conversations can occur through the Professional Learning Communities model. This model encourages collaborative work, which uses inquiry to bring about change on school campuses. Educators need to become more reflective and collaborative in their practice. "Critical reflection on one's practice and

understanding leads to higher-order thinking in the form of a capacity to exercise judgment in the face of uncertainty and to create designs in the presence of constraints and unpredictability" (Shulman, 2003, p. 3).

The practice of reflection can be an important process in educator's professional development. "In 1987, Donald Schon, introduced the concept of reflective practice as a critical process in refining one's artistry or craft in a specific discipline" (Ferraro, 2000, p. 2). By allowing time and practice of reflection and collaboration, Professional Learning Communities can be a more effective means of professional development, which can then foster change in teacher practice. When educators focus on student work and student learning as well as their own practices in structured and collaborative conversations, professional development will be deepened and school improvement will occur (Little et al., 2003). "Professional development must be constructed in ways that deepen the discussion, open up the debates, and enrich the array of possibilities for action" (Little, 1994, p. 40).

This research studies teachers' perceptions and expectations of their Hispanic students. By analyzing a teacher focus group's dialogue and especially the group's choice of words, this study used the qualitative research designs known as ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenological research, while also keeping in mind critical race theory (Freire, 2007), expectancy theory (Ferguson, 1998), and sociocultural theory (Gay, 2000). The intent of this research design—grounded theory—was to study a group of individuals who were interacting in a professional

learning community and as a focus group, discussing a particular topic and observing

their process and interaction in order to answer the following research questions:.

1. What are teachers' perceptions and expectations of their minority and low-

   socioeconomic students?

2. To what degree do teachers recognize their biases?

While measuring student achievement was not directly addressed in this study, the

first step, and the intent of the study, was to determine teachers' awareness of their

own biases and differing perceptions and expectations of their students, especially

their Hispanic students. The next step would be for teachers to change their practice in

order to improve all students' academic achievement. Understandably, the first step

could be more time consuming and difficult then the second step.

Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap: The disparity in the academic performance of students, especially in groups of minority students and students of low socioeconomic status, in relation to the academic performance of their peers, is known as the achievement gap (Abramson, 2006).

Expectations: "Something looked forward to, whether feared or hoped for" (Farlex, 2010).

Perception: "The process by which an organism detects and interprets information from the external world by means of the sensory receptors" (Farlex, 2010).

Professional Learning Community: *G*roups of educators who share a commitment to improving student achievement (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005).

Reflection: Thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline (Schon, 1996).

Social Cognition: The correlation between one's environment, thought processes and assumptions, and one's behavior (Bandura, 1997).

Social Constructivism: Maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Richardson, 1997).

Student Achievement: In education, most often determined by a grade, mark, or score (Farlex, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

THE GAP CONTINUES TO GROW

Although the implementation of No Child Left Behind was meant to ensure

that all students had access to highly qualified teachers and that as a result the

achievement gap between Caucasian students and African American and Hispanic

students would decrease and eventually be eliminated, the gaps remain. By improving

the quality of education across the United States, the learning opportunities and thus

future possibilities for all students would change. What was once only attainable by a

few would be reachable by most. Darling-Hammond (2007) and other researchers

(Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004) stand by the premise that the heart of a

quality education depends upon quality teachers and teaching. Most researchers have

looked at the practice of these teachers yet not at their educational philosophy and

beliefs about the children they teach. Research on teacher effectiveness consistently

agrees

> …that teachers have large effects on student achievement, that the
> measures of effectiveness are stable over time, and that the effects
> teachers have are on an order of magnitude which dwarfs the effects
> associated with curriculum, staff development, restructuring, and other
> types of educational interventions. (Mendro, Jordan, Gomez, Anderson,
> & Bembry, 1998, p. 1)

A study known as Project STAR conducted by Nye and colleagues in 2004, found that

the differences among teachers has a larger impact on student achievement than

students' socioeconomic status or even class size. "This implies an effective teacher is

effective with all students, regardless of their SES background; conversely, an

ineffective teacher is ineffective with all students" (Grant, Xu, Stronge, Little, & Sun, 2009).

       Latino and African American males lag behind all subgroups in measures of academic success except for special education students and English Language Learners. The disparity in educational opportunities is growing rather than diminishing, which is also impacting these same students' opportunities in the labor market as the majority of jobs (more than 70%) require skills and training beyond that which is offered in high school. They lead most dropout statistics and are overrepresented in the youth penal population (Haycock, 2002). "Latinos and African Americans are as segregated by poverty as they are by race and ethnicity, which may be the more important issue with which our schools have to deal" (Berliner, 2005, p. 14). Higher education is one way to bridge the income gap; however, it is often these same children who are not given the information, support, or encouragement they need to enter postsecondary institutions (Nelson, 2006). In his research, Ali (2002) found that 71% of high school students want to attend a four year college while teachers expect only 32% of their students to go on to college. In 2000, Hispanic students had significantly lower high school graduation rates (63%) than their African American (87%) and Caucasian (94%) peers (Brindis, Driscoll, Biggs, & Valderrama, 2002). Hispanics are also less likely to attend college; only about 33% go on to college (Brindis, et al.). This discrepancy in achievement and access to a college education plays out in socioeconomic realities as well. The number of Hispanic and African

American young people in our prison system today is growing in larger proportion

than the numbers of these same young people on college campuses.

> Meanwhile, poorly educated California children are dropping out of
> school in increasing numbers—recent statistics show the graduation
> rate having declined to 67% in 2006—and the state's prisons are
> bursting at the seams, filled largely with dropouts and functionally
> illiterate young men. (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 319)

The inequities (access to better teachers and more rigorous courses) in the K-12 public

educational system create the ongoing impact this disparity is currently having and

will continue to have on the nation's economic future.

Sociocultural/Constructivism Theory

There are different interpretations of constructivism; one of these

interpretations—attributed to researcher Lev Vygotsky—is known as sociocultural or

social constructivism. Looking at the larger context of the school system as a cultural

system, which creates human activity and thought, the work of Lev Vygotsky, a

psychologist in the 1900s who framed sociocultural theories, takes on a perspective of

the individual's behavior that creates or is created by the system it participates in.

Constructivism is a theory that attempts to explain how human beings learn. It

maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understandings or

knowledge through the interaction of what they already know and believe and the

ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Cannella & Reiff, 1994;

Richardson, 1997). Knowledge is acquired through involvement with content instead

of imitation or repetition (Kroll & LaBosky, 1996). Thus, learning activities in

constructivist settings are characterized by active engagement, inquiry, problem

solving, and collaboration with others. Rather than the sage on the stage, the teacher is

a guide and facilitator who encourages students to question, challenge, and formulate

their own ideas, opinions, and conclusions. Correct answers and single interpretations

are de-emphasized. Constructivist approaches are believed to produce deeper

understanding and thus actual internalization than traditional teaching methods.

Two major issues that divide the social constructivist and sociocultural theories

are: (1) education for individual development versus education for social

transformation and (2) the degree of influence that social context has on individual

cognitive development (Richardson, 1997; Vadeboncoeur, 1997).

Social constructivism emphasizes education for social transformation and

reflects a theory of human development that situates the individual within a

sociocultural context. Individual development derives from social interactions within

which cultural meanings are shared by the group and eventually internalized by the

individual (Richardson, 1997). Schools are sociocultural settings where cultural tools,

such as reading, writing, mathematics, and even certain types of dialogue are used

(Richardson, 1997).

Both social constructivist and sociocultural theories assume that theory and

practice do not develop in a vacuum; they are shaped by dominant cultural

assumptions (Martin, 1994; O'Loughlin, 1995). Both formal knowledge, the subject of

instruction, and the way it is presented are influenced by the historical and cultural

environment that generated them. To accomplish the goals of social transformation

and reconstruction, which is the aim of social constructivism, the context of education must be deconstructed, and the cultural assumptions, power relationships, and historical influences upon which it is based must be exposed, critiqued, and, when necessary, changed (Myers, 1996). Thus teachers must be aware of how social beliefs and cultural assumptions have influenced teaching theory and practice. Without this awareness and scrutiny, inequities and oppression continue to be perpetuated in classrooms. Worse still are those teachers and educational leaders who define themselves as "colorblind" believing that by seeing no color they are treating all children equally. Instead, they are contributing to the belief that race and issues of race are not important or relevant within their classroom and in their practice. They fail to acknowledge their own cultural and educational experiences having shaped their teaching practice, as well as the cultural experiences of their students contributing to that child's experience of school. The ability to function effectively in ones culture of origin and be able to understand the sociopolitical and cultural aspects of society are the components of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings et al., 2005). Vygotsky and other sociocultural theorists believe that social and cultural processes are key to understanding the learning and development of students. Critical race theorists include discussion on race and power and how these impact student learning.

Earlier approaches to understanding culture and race in connection to learning were steeped in the discriminatory philosophies of their time and were used to explain differences on IQ tests and achievement by attributing these differences to cultural and

biological factors. The biological models of deficiency were then replaced by cultural deficit models; minority students were not biologically disadvantaged but culturally disadvantaged (poverty and environments lacking in cognitive stimulation). Programs like Head Start began to combat this "reality." This culture of poverty continues to be popular as seen with the popularity of *Frameworks of Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne.

In the early 1970s, scholars and educators proclaimed the necessity of a different educational experience for students of color in order to produce successful educational outcomes. Multicultural education (Nieto, 1996) supported pedagogical strategies that would better support the learning of minority students. Cultural responsiveness and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings et al., 2005) then emerged. These strategies include classroom processes and ways of learning that would increase participation of minority students.

Later, in 2000, Gay's work reminded us that the culturally responsive teaching approach had its ideological beginnings in the early discourse on cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Culturally responsive teaching calls for teachers to examine their own issues, biases and cultural differences that may prevent them from teaching students of color effectively.

Critical Race Theory

Critical theories of race or Critical Race Theory (CRT) address issues of race, power, class and social structures in relation to individuals and groups. "These

theories attend to the ideologies and discourses that function to perpetuate and re-create institutional hierarchies and biases that marginalize people of color and the poor" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 470). CRT evolved out of the legal response to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and has been attributed to the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. Both were concerned that racial reform in the United States was not occurring as quickly as needed and that the very real effects of race and racism in the United States had to be confronted in order to move to a more just society.

Critical race theorists believe that racism is so much a part of our culture that it appears normal as evident in the educational system's power to continue to oppress and marginalize groups of students. Critical race theorists believe in the potential of the American educational system to do the opposite—to empower our youth to transform the system and our society. White privilege has become so insidious, so much the norm, that is has become our way of knowing and understanding the world in which we live. The insidious nature of this privilege continues to shape our curriculum, educational standards, and the educational system itself.

Examples of this privilege prevail. Bilingualism is still viewed by many as "un-American." Children from households that speak a language or languages other than English are still viewed from a deficit model and are seen and even evaluated as having an obstacle to learning. A parent in the Globe Unified School District recently emailed a complaint to the district office, the school board, and the local paper, stating that her child's school was doing Back to School Night in Spanish *and* in English. Her

complaint was that in the United States, we should only speak English and everyone should learn English.

In the not too distant past (1930s) students of color were viewed as less competent mentally, less clean; this was the argument for segregated schools. Schools still base their beliefs about students of color on political, social, and/or religious views. There is still a prevalent belief within schools that children who come from culturally different backgrounds and households are inferior and not agents of additional knowledge and experience. The United States continues to celebrate assimilation instead of biculturalism (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Cultural deficit models largely came about in the 1960s as a result of social scientists and educators who began to study what they termed "culturally deprived" or "disadvantaged" youth. The major belief behind this model was that children who were not middle class and White were lacking in socialization, education, and culture. Evidence of this can be seen in books like Riessman's *The Culturally Deprived Child* published in 1962 (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 216). Students of color became children at risk—they were one and the same. Although it was believed that this would bring needed attention and support to these children, instead it has only continued and perhaps even strengthened the belief of "the other," children who are less capable and able than their White counterparts.

Cultural Race Theorists question what constitutes valuable knowledge in our schools and why the cultural backgrounds of our students of color are devalued and minimized. Ladson-Billings (1999) reports on several teacher-education programs that

are making a difference. But all the research and writing have been focused on education programs for *new* teachers—not on working with the teachers presently within the school.

Others, like Freire (2007), argue that minority students have difficulties in our school systems because of the organization of our society and our schools and that their failure can not be addressed or improved until we address these failures in society and school systems first. Cultural repression tends to be the norm within our schools; evidenced by the absence of minority representation and predominantly Euro-centric perspectives in textbooks. The multicultural education model is one such design that did not go to the depth needed to bring about real institutional and systemic change (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Ladson-Billings,1998). Schools operate to teach students how to operate within the status quo of society and to accept White middle-class values. Students, as a result, feel the pull between choosing their own culture and family or school success (Nieto, 2000).

Critical Race Theory has even been evolved into Latino Race Theory (otherwise referred to as LatCrit) to ensure that these marginalized students become the centerpiece of research and action, especially as the numbers of Latinos/Latinas in our educational system continues to grow. Latinas/os constitute the largest ethnic/racial group in the United States—and enrollment numbers are increasing—yet they have the lowest education attainment levels of all groups. Note the following diagrams reproduced from Solorzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005).

Table 1: The U.S. Educational Pipeline

Latinas/os	Native Americans	African Americans	Whites
100 Elementary Students			
52	71	72	84
Graduate from High School			
10	12	14	26
Graduate from College			
4	4	5	10
Graduate from Graduate School			
0.4	0.5	0.4	1.0
Graduate with Degree			

The Latina/o Educational Pipeline
100 Elementary School Students
↓
48 Drop out of School   ↔   **52** Graduate from High School
↓   ↓   ↓
20 Go to a Community College   **31** Enroll in College   **11** Go to a 4- year college
↓
2 Transfer to a 4-yr College   **10** Graduate w/ a B.A. Degree
↓
4 Graduate w/ a Graduate or
Professional Degree
↓
Less than 1 Graduates w/ a
Doctoral Degree
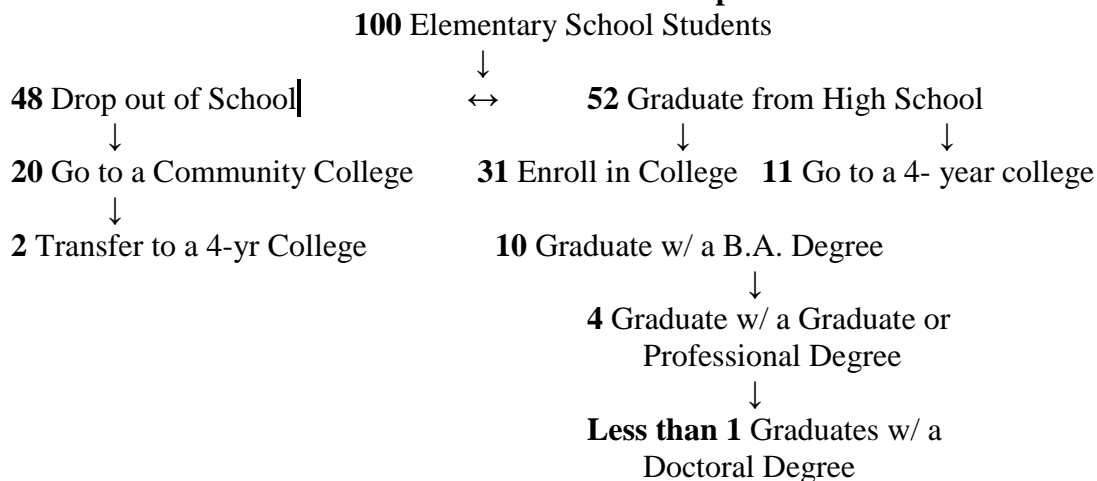
Critical Race Theorists want to disrupt, expose, and ultimately change these subversive racist policies and practices that continue to disenfranchise particular groups of people, as well as attempt to maintain the status quo. In order to even begin

a discourse on ways in which to improve the educational system, which continues to fail many of our Latino students, educators must listen to these children and their families' stories in order to better understand our current system's faults. The voices of disenfranchised students have often been silenced and even denigrated in classrooms (Fine, 1991).

Teacher Perceptions and Student Achievement

The College Board's National Task Force on Minority Achievement (1999) provided evidence regarding ongoing gaps among African American, Latino, and Native American students and their White and Asian counterparts. These gaps begin in elementary school, continue through the postsecondary levels of education and persist regardless of socioeconomic status of the student's family. This has also been substantiated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and science tests (1996 results) and reading tests (1998 results) even those the gaps were less on the reading scores.

Undoubtedly a complicated and multifaceted problem, as early as the 1950's, researchers were finding evidence in teacher practice, expectations, and perceptions to explain some of these gaps. Sociologist Howard Becker (1952) found that teachers in schools within lower socioeconomic areas used different teaching techniques and expected less from their students than did teachers in middle-class schools. Subsequently, Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) research showed teachers' expectations of their students' behavior became a self-fulfilling prophecy. They

believed a possible explanation for this finding is that the younger the child, the more susceptible the child is to a teacher's expectations. A young child is able to be influenced and convinced more easily of their academic ability. The researchers also felt that younger students do not yet have well-established reputations at the school and are thus able to be more easily susceptible to a teacher's influence.

The concept of self-fulfilling prophecy was introduced as early as the 1940s. Researchers Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966, 1968) borrowed the phrase "Pygmalion effect" from a play by George Bernard Shaw titled "Pygmalion" and then later made into the film "My Fair Lady." The Pygmalion effect can result from cultural and racial expectations. This effect was later explored by teacher Jane Elliott with her class of third graders in the famous blue-eyes, brown-eyes discrimination exercise (1968). She divided the class by their eye color. One group was favored and regarded as "superior" because of their eye color. The next day, the other group was treated as superior to their peers. On each day of this two-day experiment, Elliot gave spelling tests to her students. The group defined as inferior scored low on the day they were judged negatively. On the next day, when the group was judged as superior by the teacher, they scored high on the spelling test. Other researchers have found similar negative effects of teacher behaviors on student achievement. In 1974, Chaiken and colleagues videotaped the interactions of teachers and students in classrooms where the teachers had been told that particular students were gifted; however, the "gifted" students had been randomly chosen. Upon analysis of the videotapes, the researchers found that in very subtle ways, the teachers favored those students who they had been told had great

potential. It is not likely that teachers purposefully behave differently toward any individual or group of students. Regardless of their intentions, when a teacher assumes that particular students will not perform as well as other students, the teacher's negative assumptions are inadvertently communicated to the students and, all too often, the Pygmalion effect takes its course as was the case in a study of low socioeconomic Algebra 1 students and their teachers (Schullo and Alperson,1998). Researchers found that these students' successes and failures were affected by the differing personal beliefs about learning among the students and teachers.

Similarly, Akey's 2006 report analyzed data from an urban school district during a three-year period of time (2001-2004) in the midst of school reform efforts and explored "the influence of two psychological variables—student engagement and perceived academic competence—on achievement in reading and mathematics" (p. 10). The study involved high school students from schools within the district that had a population comprised of 67% Hispanic students. The study found that this "perceived academic competence" had a positive influence upon reading and math achievement. Akey found that "perceived academic competence" was shaped by "school context—teacher support, clear and consistent expectations of behavior, and student-to-student interactions in the classroom" (Akey, p. 4). These elements were found to have a greater impact than student engagement.

Students in a caring learning environment do better on standardized tests than those students in less caring environments (Larkins-Strathy & LaRocco, 2007). Minority students especially perform better when teachers demonstrate respect,

fairness, acceptance, and have created a learning atmosphere where students can freely ask questions and are able to make mistakes.

Ferguson (1998) reported that teachers use race as part of the information that forms their impression of a student and his or her potential. This racial bias may not be the result of a dislike of one group or another but may be the result of a teacher's previous experience with different types of students. Ferguson states that this becomes a problem when the teacher's bias inadvertently impacts a student's performance. This has become especially the case for Hispanic youth. Lockwood and Secada (1999) reported that teachers do not take Hispanic students seriously and definitely do not take these students future's seriously. Their attitudes about these students impact these students' achievement in school. They report that many Hispanic youth drop out of school because

> if these kids are not closely tied in a personal, caring sense to valued adults, there is a peer group that is all too ready to accept them and to move them out of the school—or out of the achieving part of the school. (Lockwood & Secada, p. 8)

Further, Hispanic youth face ongoing stereotypes and prejudice, often the result of anti-immigration forces across the United States. They are confronted by teachers who don't believe they care about school or want to learn, who believe they use drugs, belong to gangs, or are on their way to gang involvement and identification (Kober, 2001; Lockwood & Secada, 1999).

By continuing to set their expectations low, teachers inadvertently perpetuate the achievement gap.

Social cognitive theory offers insight into this underlying belief system. This theory attempts to explain the correlation among one's environment, thought processes and assumptions, and one's behavior (Bandura, 1997). The theory describes the various influences of external and environmental conditions and cognition on behavior and vice versa. One's behavior can also influence one's cognitive functioning. This theory can be used to explain teachers' differing expectations of different students. If a teacher has success with students she wouldn't normally have success with, her underlying beliefs about these students may change, resulting in a continued change in her behavior and expectations. However, the reverse can also be true. This could explain why teachers have created different expectations and beliefs about their Hispanic students. The theory attempts to explain this complex relationship among environment, behavior, and one's belief system.

Another theory that explains this complex relationship is constructivism. It maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Richardson, 1997). Knowledge is acquired through involvement with content instead of imitation or repetition (Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996).

Although constructivism applies more to learning than to teaching, it explains how the educational system itself may have helped to create the achievement gap. Cultural assumptions and our social beliefs have shaped our schools and classrooms. Until we are able to deconstruct these beliefs and their resulting behaviors, the

achievement gap will continue to exist, even with the best of practices in place. If

teachers can be guided to deconstruct their own prior knowledge and attitudes,

comprehend how these understandings evolved, explore the effects on their actions

and behaviors as teachers, and on their students' academic achievement, then we can

begin to construct new knowledge that considers alternate conceptions and premises to

allow for more equitable treatment and expectations of all children. The construction

of new knowledge and belief systems may occur through critical analysis and

structured reflection incorporated into professional learning community dialogue.

Professional Development Practices

Past and dominant models of professional development have relied on

trainings focused on developing or expanding teachers' repertoire of classroom

practice or their content knowledge. "Professional development is more effective

when schools approach it not in isolation (as in the traditional one-shot workshop) but

rather as a coherent part of a school reform effort" (Darling-Hammond & Richardson,

2009). Currently, most reform has called for this type of training and for time

embedded in teachers' workdays and years that allows for collaboration.

> Principals have a reciprocal responsibility to provide teams with the
> time, structures, training, resources, and clarity of purpose to help them
> succeed. But time devoted to building the capacity of teachers to work
> in teams is far better spent than time devoted to observing individual
> teachers to ensure they are demonstrating the right moves in the
> classroom. (DuFour & Marzano, 2009, p. 62)

Professional development must move beyond what is just helpful to one teacher in one classroom to what can promote schoolwide change. It must also be in an environment of trust where teachers are able to raise issues and take risks. The most promising forms of professional development engage teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems, and curiosities, over time, in ways that leave a mark on perspectives, policy, and practice" (Little, 1994, p. 5). Thus Little argues that professional development should be created to engage teachers in deeper dialogues and compel them to action. Research supports professional development that guides teachers to discuss how students learn, how to best teach students so they can learn. Darling-Hammond and Richardson assert that effective professional development must be active, experiential learning that teachers can apply to their practice and have the opportunity to reflect upon. This involves collaboration because it is intensive work that must be sustained over time to have impact on student achievement. These learning opportunities for teachers can improve teaching and learning. Teachers will then recreate these similar "rigorous and engaging opportunities for students" (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, p. 52).

Linda Lambert (2002) sees learning as a community effort in which all teachers share responsibility not only for student learning and their own professional learning, but the learning of their peers as well. "For decades, educators have understood that we are all responsible for student learning. More recently, educators have come to realize that we are responsible for our own learning as well" (Lambert, p. 40).

"The formation of learning communities develops the capacities among diverse organizations within a system to collaborate in order to accomplish changes that would be impossible for those organizations to achieve individually" (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004, p. 13). Widespread improvement in education will not come as a result of one visionary leader on a campus, as was once believed, but from a distributive model of leadership (Copland, 2001). Copland asserts that the application of the heroic leader model of change is a tenuous way to view educational reform because the departure of the heroic leader removes the foundation of the improvement effort. In the heroic leader model, people are overly dependent on one person. In order to create sustainable change, schools need to build leadership capacity among the staff. Identification of important problems and issues, as well as decisions and the development of solutions for these problems, must be done collectively. Educators must focus on student work and student learning, as well as what constitutes excellent instructional practice. School leadership models must move away from the hierarchical structure, which is so common in our schools, and instead have its "roots in both cognitive and social theories of organizational learning" (Copland, 2001, p. 2). However, this all must be grounded in a foundational educational philosophy that acts upon the belief that all students can achieve academic success. Educators must be willing to look critically at their personal beliefs, attitudes, and the expectations of individual students in order to ensure that they are interacting with and teaching without bias and lowered expectations. We cannot underestimate the potential of any student.

"Professional development programs need not always focus on specific teaching methods and strategies; they can also focus on teacher attitudes that affect practice" (Ferraro, 2000, p. 2). Generating Expectations for Student Achievement (GESA) is one such professional development program. It was created by Grayson and Martin in 1997. Based on research findings, the program seeks to make teachers aware of five areas of disparity in classroom practice that could cause teachers to have lower expectations for particular students: race, class and gender affect student achievement, instructional contact; grouping and organization; classroom management and discipline; self-esteem; and evaluation of student performance" (Beyerbach et al., 2008).

To become aware and stay aware of possible differential treatment toward students, reflection and professional discourse as a process and ongoing practice is key to improving teachers' craft (Schon, 1996; Ferraro, 2000). It is only with consistent dialogue over time that reflection is developed and the construction of new knowledge is allowed.

Wenglinsky (2001) argues that professional development that focuses on different student populations as well as on higher order thinking skills will involve more of their students in experiential and engaging learning. He concludes that teacher practice has a larger impact on student achievement than does a students' socioeconomic status.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities can provide an opportunity for educators to collaborate, to be more reflective about their practice, and to share best practices. This model for professional development and learning has the potential to create the changes that we need to see throughout our schools.

The expression "learning community" was coined as early as the 1930s. Even at that early time, educators were calling for a community of study across disciplines advocating for shared inquiry. In 1990, Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* described learning organizations as places "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3).

Based on Senge's (1990) work, the model was further developed at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois by former principal Dr. Richard DuFour (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005) and his staff. When used in educational settings, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) focus on results, the learning process, and collaboration. For many teachers this is a paradigm shift about what teaching entails; Professional Learning Communities move the focus from teaching practice to the importance of focusing on student learning. If effectively implemented, PLCs provide the safety and support for teachers to investigate and assess student learning. PLCs also guide teachers to become more reflective not just about their practice but how they practice impacts student learning.

Professional Learning Communities are defined as groups of educators who share a commitment to improving student achievement (DuFour et al., 2005). They have a shared mission, vision, values, and goals. PLCs meet in collaborative teams which are focused on student learning to discuss and analyze student work and to work collaboratively to develop teaching strategies and lessons that address student academic needs and improve student outcomes. They use collective inquiry to assess best practice and current reality. Committed to continuous improvement focused on results, "a Professional Learning Community is an ethos that infuses every single aspect of a school's operation. When a school becomes a professional learning community, everything in the school looks different than it did before" (Hargreaves, 2007, p. 6). Generally speaking, that different look includes improved student achievement and a higher performing school.

Kruse and Louis (1995), Hord (1997), and DuFour, Eaker & DuFour (2005) agree that having a shared vision and values are key to the implementation and development of Professional Learning Communities. Kruse and Louis and DuFour and Eaker also believe that the primary focus of PLCs needs to be on student learning and that a collaborative team by using reflection and inquiry must determine goals in order to achieve results for improved student learning and achievement.

Alan Blankstein and colleagues (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2004) has identified six principles of high-performing schools: the importance of creating a common mission, vision, and goals; creating prevention and intervention strategies in order that all students are successful; collaborative teaming methods; data which

drives decision making; engagement from family and community; and building

sustainable leadership capacity. Many of these same characteristics are the foundation

of PLCs.

> It is about educators working collaboratively in ongoing process of
> collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results
> for the students they serve. PLC's operate under the assumption that the
> key to improved learning for students is continuous, job embedded
> learning for educators. (DuFour et al., 2005, p. 13)

When educators are given the time to work together, it is believed that schools can

improve learning for all students.

Hord (1997) argues for a distributive leadership model that goes beyond

collective learning to an application of learning in order to achieve improved student

academic performance. This application of learning involves changes in teacher

behavior within the classroom. Marzano (2003) and Copland (2003) have developed

what they feel are the essential elements upon which educators must focus in order to

bring about improved student achievement, but they fail to acknowledge the

differences in educational philosophy and beliefs among educators in a particular

school community and how these differences can become barriers to the change

process. Researchers have found that teachers' beliefs, practice, and values have a

profound impact on student achievement (Haycock, 2006; Intrator & Kunzman, 2006).

If teachers do not believe their students can excel, then their students will fail. Too

often these negative beliefs are directed more toward their students of color and those

who live in poverty (Haycock). Teachers' own lowered expectations have created the

lowered expectations of their students and their students' future opportunities.

Teaching involves more than knowing one's content well; it also involves the awareness of one's "values, commitments, or internalized dispositions" (Shulman, 2003, p. 4). Educators need to uncover these beliefs and make them more transparent, which can be best done in collaborative groups. This also implies that teachers and administrators must accept that they are part of the problem. They have been accustomed to working alone which is safer and often preferable to working collaboratively (Barth, 1991). It is increasing this awareness and providing an environment that supports collaboration, which will initiate the learning process needed for change to occur.

Collaborative practice is not new to the teaching profession but it is not often relied upon as a method of professional development. Just as is often the case in many classrooms, professional development has often focused on the "sage on the stage" teaching technique. Instead of relying on educators' experience and expertise, the teaching profession has often gone to "experts" for direction and answers. Collaboration is often challenging due to time constraints and the past practice of autonomy. Creating a collaborative culture, although time-consuming at the onset, is having positive impacts on student achievement.

Collaboration doesn't just occur by putting a team of educators together. The conversation must be focused. However, even before that, norms of operation and dialogue must be created by the group. One such system is known as the BART system. BART is an acronym for four elements of group analysis: Boundary, Authority, Role, and Task. Boundary is the space in which work happens in the group.

This includes time and place of the work. Authority is defined as the responsibility and accountability of the group. Collaborative work can be seen as a waste of time if the participants don't feel that their work will be valued by the organization or useful to their own individual practice and work. The more individuals know about the elements that influence their authority, the more likely they may exercise personal authority in relation to the task. People occupy roles. If we understand our role within a group, role confusion and potential conflict with colleagues can be avoided. And finally, clear understanding of the task before the group helps to focus the work. Conflicts arise when perceptions of the task differ from person to person or from group to group. Also integral to this environment and practice of collaboration is the process of reflection among educators.

The differences between individual and group learning, as well as the importance of changing practice along with perception, are the learning processes involved in bringing about change in the practice of educators. A strong reflective element centered in the pursuit of a common objective or activity (lesson) is the key to successful and enduring change (Reeves & Forde, 2004). Many staff development efforts fail to transfer new knowledge into new practice. Professional development activities should engage teachers and cultivate their capacity to teach with greater consciousness, self-awareness, and integrity (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006). Shulman (2003) discusses the importance of critical reflection to enable and sustain change. He also states that the relationship between reflection and action is "a paradoxical one

because in order to act in the most effective ways, we sometimes must cease action"

(p. 5).

> At The Carnegie Foundation, we often talk about our work as attempts
> to provide mirrors and lenses that can assist others to pause, reflect, and
> see their work differently as they move into a next stage of activity.
> Thus, action without reflection is unlikely to produce learning.
> (Shulman, p. 4)

Potential Contribution of PLCs to School Reform

The Professional Learning Community is an approach to professional

development that supports the reflective practice that leads to school change and

improvement. Ferraro (2000) states that "the primary benefit of reflective practice for

teachers is a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater

effectiveness as a teacher" (p. 2). Educators often feel isolated, in their own room and

with their own set of students, apart from the entire staff. Teachers and an entire staff

should feel that they are a vital part of the school community. When people feel that

their opinions and educational practices matter, and when they feel honored and

respected, often their soul is fed. In Professional Learning Communities, teachers and

school administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they

learn. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that

students benefit. This arrangement has also been termed *communities of continuous

inquiry and improvement* (Hord, 1997). Little (1994) wrote, "Professional

development prepares teachers (as well as students and their parents) to employ the

techniques and perspectives of inquiry. It provides the possibility for teachers and

others to interrogate their individual beliefs and the institutional patterns of practice"

(p. 25).

A 2007 study by Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran "suggest[s] that

schools with greater levels of teacher collaboration did indeed have significantly

higher levels of student achievement. Thus, not only is collaboration good for

teachers—quite possibly by fostering teacher learning—but it is also positively related

to student achievement" (p. 9). Changing practice is a social activity that involves

"social spaces" (Reeves & Forde, 2004). These spaces are the ways in which we view

and operate with regards to our worker identity, learner identity, and changing

identity. Data indicates that changing practice (practical learning) is both collective

and individual since for the individual to change her practice entails that those she

practices with must change their actions as well" (Reeves & Forde, 2004, p. 90). A

work-based learning program with a strong reflective element centered on the pursuit

of a common objective or activity (lesson) is the key to successful and enduring

change (Reeves & Forde). The transfer of new skills, knowledge, and attitudes

happens more readily when the training occurs within the person's workplace.

Professional Learning Communities provide a structure for such training, discussion,

and accountability among educators on a school site.

In a review of a synthesis of five case studies, Kruse and Louis (1995)

conclude that being part of a Professional Learning Community reduces teacher

isolation, increases commitment to the mission and goals of the school, creates shared

responsibility for the total development of students, creates powerful learning that

defines good teaching and classroom practice, and enhances understanding of course content. For students, the results include decreased dropout rates, greater academic gains in math, science, history, and reading, and smaller achievement gaps. One of the first characteristics cited by Kruse and Louis of individuals in a productive learning community is a willingness to accept feedback and to work toward improvement. In addition, they also believe that the following qualities are needed: respect and trust among colleagues at the school and district level, possession of an appropriate cognitive and skill base that enables effective teaching and learning, supportive leadership from administrators and others in key roles, and relatively intensive socialization processes. Along with working collectively, teachers must also ask questions of themselves and one another that focus on student learning. With regard to the achievement gap and student failure, these questions are hard and do not have easy answers. It is within such an environment of inquiry that change will occur, including teachers' perceptions and expectations that affect student achievement.

Deeper Conversations Through Inquiry

Educators who are willing and able to ask difficult and critical questions about their own practice will be able to bring about change in their practice. This reflective and collaborative conversation must also analyze what is working and what is not working for their students. "Research on effective teaching over the past two decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth" (Ferraro, 2000, p. 2). In 2002, Linda Lambert wrote about a new

framework for school improvement. This framework embodied teachers, parents, and students taking collective responsibility and collaborating together in study or learning groups to improve student achievement. These teams would, in turn, use data to determine growth areas and success as well as to indentify problems areas and pose new questions.

Many educators first became familiar with the term "critical thinking" back in the 1980s when it was popular to capture this particular concept in school mission statements. With the advent of Bloom's Taxonomy and Arthur Costa's Levels of Questioning, the ways in which teachers taught inquiry and developed critical thinking skills had been shaped. Before this type of instruction can take place, classroom practitioners must reevaluate their fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning and master those "habits of mind" that lead to natural modes of inquiry about any subject or content area. If one believes in the mantra "we teach what we know" then one would agree that in order for teachers to teach thinking skills they must have a depth of understanding that surpasses superficial surface levels of questioning.

Thinking is a complex and active process that demands collaboration and intellectual participation. It involves asking questions that facilitate deeper and more profound thinking. Most importantly, for authentic thinking to take place in any classroom at any grade level or within professional learning communities, educators and students must be engaged and motivated to want to know something. True learning and understanding will only be achieved when we are involved together in the

process of questioning and critically thinking. Questioning our practices is more important today than ever in order for school reform to occur and to be sustainable.

"Human systems grow toward what they persistently ask questions about" (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 7). The use of inquiry is important to build the capacity for school improvement. One way to accomplish school improvement is by encouraging the formation of learning communities and by developing the capacities among diverse organizations within a system to collaborate in order to accomplish changes that would be impossible for those organizations to achieve individually (Senge, 1990).

A professional development model based on equity and social justice is Generating Expectations for Student Achievement (GESA). This model works on the premise that by raising teachers' consciousness about their classroom behaviors and expectations will "reduce disparities in the way they treat their students (Beyerbach, et al., 2008, p. 1). GESA has over 70 years of educational research as evidence backing the approaches they use to reduce the achievement gap. By focusing on teacher behaviors and expectations, schools can achieve greater social justice and equity for all students. This too can impact the support and learning for all children.

It is a conversation that educators must begin to have, a conversation built upon questions that enable them to explore deep issues of bias and expectation. The use of inquiry is important to building the capacity for school improvement. The development and use of inquiry builds an individual's awareness of the world around him and his part within a community (Lucas, 2003). The more one questions, the more

one seeks to finds answers. Senge (1990) talks about the need to not only notice the elephant (big issues) in the room or to call it out, but, more importantly, to have rich and courageous conversations about it.

One way to have deeper conversations is by using the "World Café" process, which began in 1995 and was developed by Juanita Brown (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). This process was begun "in the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, an approach to organizational learning and development originated by David Cooperrider and his colleagues" (p. 7). Appreciative Inquiry is a deliberate process that places its focus on what is working and what is life affirming (Brown & Isaacs).

A Café that fails to center on questions that have real heart and meaning becomes a mechanical process of people talking and moving and reporting back. It fails to generate energy and excitement for the same reason that most organizations fail to generate energy—the questions and issues with which people are engaging simply do not compel their commitment and imagination. (Brown & Isaacs, p. 219)

Not until a school and its teachers take "collective responsibility for achieving a shared educational purpose and collaborates with one another to achieve that purpose will schools be able to move toward asking critical questions and engaging in conversations that will make a difference for their school and students" (Newmann, 1994, p. 1).

Creating a culture of reflection, dialogue, and democratic discourse is important. Equally as important are the questions upon which the dialogue centers that will ensure schools bring about change. This is the crux of the issue.

Conclusion

The educational system has been fraught with social injustice and unfulfilled promises for a better and more equitable education for all children (Williamson, Rhodes, & Dunson, 2007). To enact change, it must be the educational leaders— administrative, district office, teachers, and staff—who embrace the importance of having difficult and challenging conversations and then do their utmost to begin and continue these conversations in spite of the difficulty and pains that are experienced. Due to longstanding and ongoing issues of equity and social justice within the educational system, administrators must do more than just respond to the challenge of diversity but must act to make a difference (Riehl, 2000). Administrators and teachers are often under attack and as a result can become cynical and defensive but, although they face many obstacles and frustrations, they must focus on making a difference in the lives of their students. They can do this by working together collaboratively in professional learning communities but this work will be undone if the they don't sustain the professional learning community model (DuFour, 2000). If these communities focus on critical questions, they can be the vehicle that closes the achievement gap. Ensuring that this ongoing dialogue becomes systemic and thus sustainable and that the right questions are being asked are keys to the change and future academic success of *all* students. (Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

"The dismissive attitudes of some teachers did not encourage many Hispanic students to participate in their classes. Such attitudes did send a definite, direct

message that Hispanic students were not valued in the school" (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). Teachers need to be aware of how different students learn, how their own behaviors and attitudes impact student achievement, and to treat all students with dignity and respect.

Educators must begin to open their minds and hearts to question the current educational system and their own practices. This questioning, the resulting conversations, and collaboration among teachers will be the ways in which change can occur. When teachers look at the data from their own classes, as well as schoolwide data trends, knowledge will grow and practice will change. This collaboration can occur on an ongoing basis in Professional Learning Communities. It is through developing Professional Learning Communities on school campuses that educators will begin to create a new future for all children. "The concept of a professional learning community rests on the premise of improving student learning by improving teaching practice" (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006, p. 6). When educators collaborate to improve student achievement by clarifying essential outcomes and focusing on results, they will be able to more critically assess individual and group practice. When ongoing teacher collaboration, reflection, and inquiry become a part of the daily routine and culture of a school and the definition of teacher professionalism then teachers will be on their way to enduring change. "Collaborative inquiry is among the most promising strategies for strengthening teaching at learning. But first, schools and districts need to create a shared understanding of the purpose and value of collaborative inquiry among teachers and administrators" (David, 2009, p. 20). If

inquiry and reflective processes become a routine part of the school's educational

practice and rigorous and challenging coursework for all students is the norm, then the

intended outcome would be greater achievement for all students.

Questions for Research

1. What are teachers' perceptions and expectations of their

   minority and low-socioeconomic students?

2. To what degree do teachers recognize their biases?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature demonstrates that teachers' perceptions and expectations of their students can lead to teacher behaviors that impact student achievement. Prior research has shown that teachers form expectations of their students based on their own perceptions as well as on students' past achievement, diagnostic labeling, test scores, and even group placement. Thomas Good defines teacher expectations as "inferences that teachers make about the future behavior or academic achievement of their students, based on what they know about these students now" (Good, 1987). Good goes on to delineate two types of teacher expectation effects: self-fulfilling prophecy and sustaining expectations. Teachers' interaction with their students are often influenced by the teachers' expectations and perceptions, especially with regards to how teachers ask questions, give feedback, and respond to their students.

This study took place at a K-8 arts magnet school that has a large Hispanic population and is within a large Southern California public school district. The research questions are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions and expectations of their minority and low-socioeconomic students?
2. To what degree do teachers recognize their biases?

Context for the Study

The location for this study is the Shakespeare Academy of Visual and Performing Arts (SAVPA) (pseudonym) in the Globe Unified School District (GUSD) (pseudonym). GUSD is a large school district in the San Diego County area of Southern California. Both the overall district and the school have been designated as program improvement (PI) for the past three years due to not meeting the state's annual yearly progress (AYP) criteria, especially for its Hispanic students, low-income students, and English Language Learners (ELL). The Globe District has experienced a dramatic change in its student population just during the past 10 years; even as overall student enrollment decreases, its Hispanic, low income, and ELL population increases.

While student demographics have changed, the teaching staff has largely remained static. Along with this change in student demographics, has come a negative change in achievement. While there are many factors that affect student achievement, resistance from teachers to adjust their practices in light of changing student needs could be an exacerbating factor. As a result, the school and the district are under advisement of the County Office of Education's District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT).

Although designed as a public school of choice within the Globe District for families across the district interested in having their children learn and engage with the arts, SAVPA has become more of a neighborhood school over the past four years, similar to its population make-up prior to becoming a magnet school. The majority of the students are Hispanic and live in the immediate vicinity. This has had an impact on teachers' perceptions of the student body as largely being composed of students who

are not really interested in the arts and are only attending the school because of convenience due to the school's close location to their homes. These perceptions and concerns emerge in staff meetings and at chairperson meetings. This perception of the neighborhood children—children who attend this school because of convenience—has then been equated to a sentiment that the English Learners and Hispanic students are not interested in the arts and therefore should not be attending the school. There is also the belief held by the majority of this school's teachers that it is not teacher practice but the lack of interest or ability (due to low income and language factors) of the students that has caused the school's Academic Performance Index (API) score to decrease. API "measures the academic performance and growth of schools on a variety of academic measures" (California Department of Education website, 2011). These perceptions and beliefs were evident in the teachers' district 2009 climate survey, which was used only for demographic and background knowledge in this study. It was not data collected as a part of this study.

Out of a possible 40 SAVPA teachers who were given the survey, 39 responded to the teachers' district climate survey. Out of these 39, only one teacher reported that the school does not "promote academic success for all students." Only two teachers felt the school does not emphasize "teaching lessons in ways relevant to students." Four teachers reported that the school was not "using instructional materials that reflect the culture or ethnicity of its students." Fourteen teachers reported that we do not have the "staff examine their own cultural biases through professional development or other processes." Only five reported that we do not consider "closing

the racial and ethnic achievement gap a high priority." Five also reported that we do

not foster "an appreciation of student diversity and respect for each other." And six

teachers reported that we do not emphasize "showing respect for all students' cultural

beliefs and practices."

From the parent survey, a written comment from a parent corroborates this last

teacher view.

> As the years go on [at SAVPA], I feel more and more as a minority—
> an unintegrated one, and that there are two "camps" at school that
> really don't mix. I also feel my 4th grader is completely under
> challenged, and nothing is being done to help her. I have signed up my
> children for [another school in the district] hoping for a more diverse
> and integrated student body.

Another parent comment: "Those teachers that show respect for their students

are at least teaching by example but I feel it doesn't always happen." From a Spanish-

speaking parent, "When I arrive at school no American people greet me. I have seen

this with others, not just myself." These comments provide evidence for the feeling

that the campus is divided into two very distinct groups – the Caucasian families and

the Hispanic families.

The school has approximately 1,100 students, of whom 67% are designated as

low income, 76% are Hispanic, and 49% are English Language Learners (ELL). The

school is situated in the center of Globe and within a community identified by the San

Diego and Globe sheriff departments as being highly involved with gangs. In fact,

Globe and the surrounding area of SAVPA area home to the infamous gang, the Globe

Home Boys. In 1997, the San Diego County district attorney began using civil

injunctions as a tool to curb gang activity. In June 2005, a court injunction was

brought against the Globe Home Boys to restrain them from engaging in any activity

in GHB safety zones," which includes neighborhoods that surround SAVPA. The

activities prohibited in these safety zones include the wearing of gang clothing, acting

as lookouts, throwing gang signs, engaging in graffiti or in possession of graffiti tools,

fighting, trespassing, blocking free passageways, being with another known gang

member, intimidating others, engaging in the use or possession of drugs or alcohol in

public, in possession of guns, dangerous weapons or burglary tools, littering, and

violating the city's curfew. This information is key to understanding some of the

perceptions and expectations held by teachers at SAVPA.

None of the SAVPA teachers lived in the same neighborhood—and some don't

live in the same city as do their students. The teachers also come from a higher

socioeconomic and educational level than the vast majority of its students' parents. In

2000, the median income for a household in Globe was $42,594. Males had a median

income of $32,936 versus $25,812 for females. The per capita for the city was

$18,027. About 10.0% of families and 14.2% of the population were below the

poverty line, including 19.0% of those under age 18. Many of the SAVPA students

and their families are even considered homeless as defined by Title I as "Living in an

apartment or house with more than one family".

As of the 2000 census, Hispanic families counted for 38.94% of the Globe

population. The Globe Unified School District's overall population has decreased by

3,000 students over the last 13 years, yet the English Learner (EL) population has

increased by 2,200 students. Approximately one in every two Globe Unified School District students is an EL or has a former EL designation. Ninety-four percent of all English Learners and reclassified students are Hispanic. Older sections of Globe are predominantly Hispanic.

SAVPA has been a program improvement (PI) school since 2006 because of failure to meet the annual yearly progress (AYP) expectations based on the California Standards Tests (CST). The State Board of Education set the statewide API target at 800 out of a possible 1,000. The Public Schools Accountability Act calls for most schools to improve their performance each year by 5% of the difference between their API and the statewide target of 800, with a minimum target of five points' growth. Specifically, 68% of our ELL and students with disabilities are at basic to far-below basic. In 2008, on the CST Mathematics test, each of the subgroups met the yearly target of 47.5%, except for English Language Learners (46.0%) and students with disabilities (40.8%) (See Table 2).. The school's 2008 AYP was 777 (See Table 3). The 2009 AYP was 793. In 2008, the school also met all subgroups (Hispanic, English Language Learners, special education, and low-income students) and could have left PI status if the school was able to continue this trend during the upcoming year (based on 2009 CST results). Instead, the school, as was true of the majority of schools within the Globe Unified School District, continued into PI. Scores plummeted by 24 points as based on 2009 CST results (See Tables 3 and 4).

Table 2: SAVPA: 2008 Percent of Students Who Scored Proficient and Advanced on the CST Tests – English Language Arts and Mathematics

Significant Subgroups in School Population	English Language Arts (46% = Year's Target as Determined by the State)	Mathematics (47.5% = Year's Target as Determined by the State)
Hispanic-Latino	39.7%	52.0%
White	84.7%	81.9%
Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	37.9%	49.6%
English Learner	31.6%	46.0%
Students w/ Disabilities	32.4%	40.8%

Table 3: SAVPA Academic Performance Index (API): 2007-2009

Significant Subgroups in School	# of Students in School	2007 Base API	2008 Growth API	Increase	2009 Growth API	Increase
Hispanic-Latino	588	685	737	52	749	12
White	192	894	919	25	925	6
Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	530	672	727	55	739	12
English Learner	476	658	704	46	714	10
Schoolwide	825	748	777	29	793	16

Table 4: SAVPA: 2009 Percent of Students Who Scored Proficient and Advanced on the CST Tests – English Language Arts and Mathematics

Significant Subgroup in School	English Language Arts (56.8% = Year's Target as Determined by the State)	Mathematics (58% = Year's Target as Determined by the State)
Hispanic-Latino	40%	43.8%
White	78.2%	77.6%
Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	39.9%	43.0%
English Learner	37.9%	32.5%
Students w/ Disabilities	37.3%	35.5%

Table 5: SAVPA: Academic Performance Index (API): 2009-2010

Significant Subgroup in School	# of Students in School	2009 Base API	2010 Growth API	Decrease
Hispanic-Latino	632	746	727	-19
White	147	921	902	-19
Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	609	736	727	-9
English Learner	477	712	697	-15
Schoolwide	809	789	765	-24

The following charts show specific data with regards to AYP subgroup comparisons in English Language Arts and in Mathematics from 2005 to 2010. The first chart shows API growth comparison from 2005 to 2010.

Table 6: SAVPA Growth API Comparison 2005-2010

Shakespeare Academy of Visual and Performing Arts
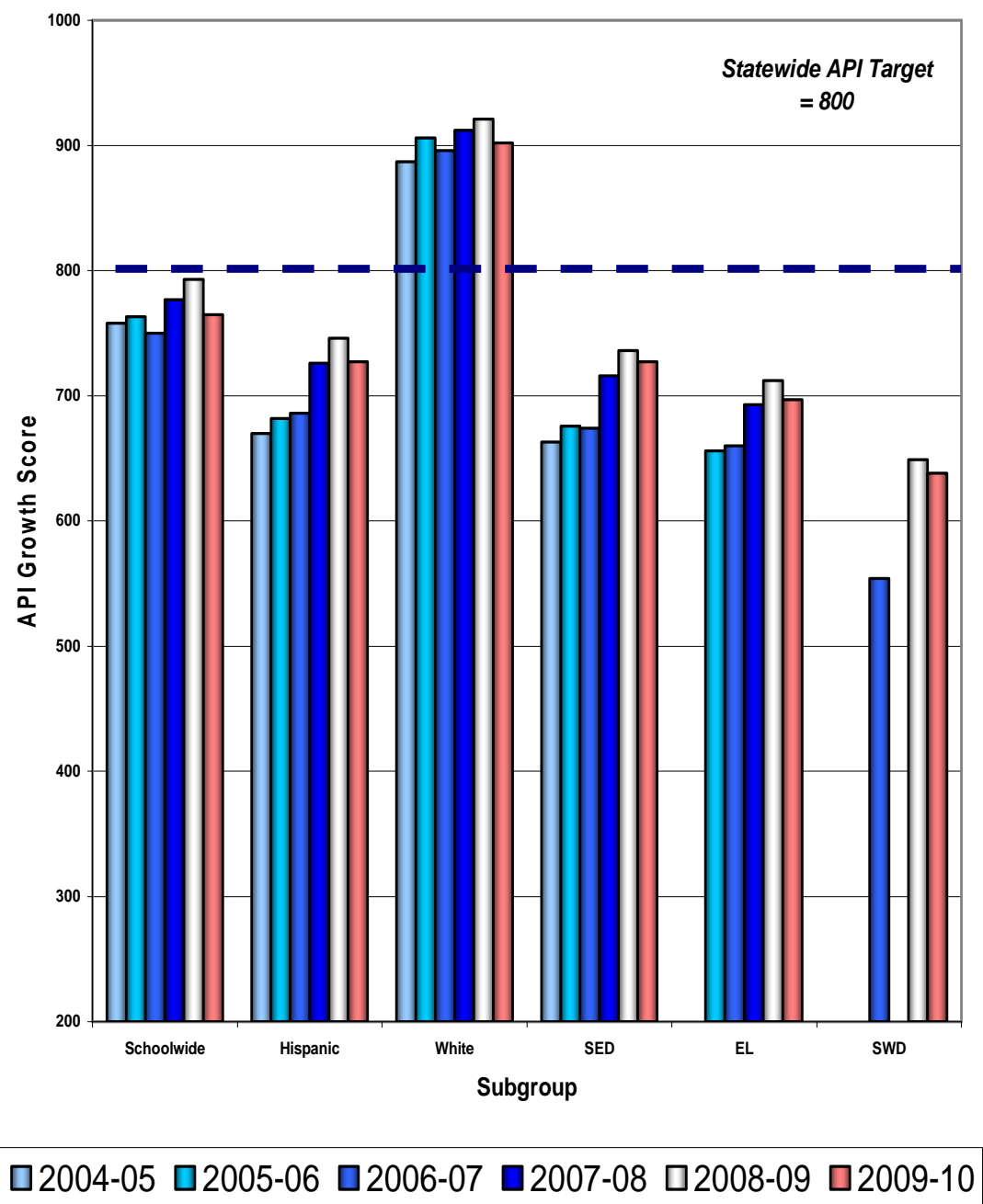**Growth API Comparison**
2005-2010

Table 7: AYP ELA 2005-2010
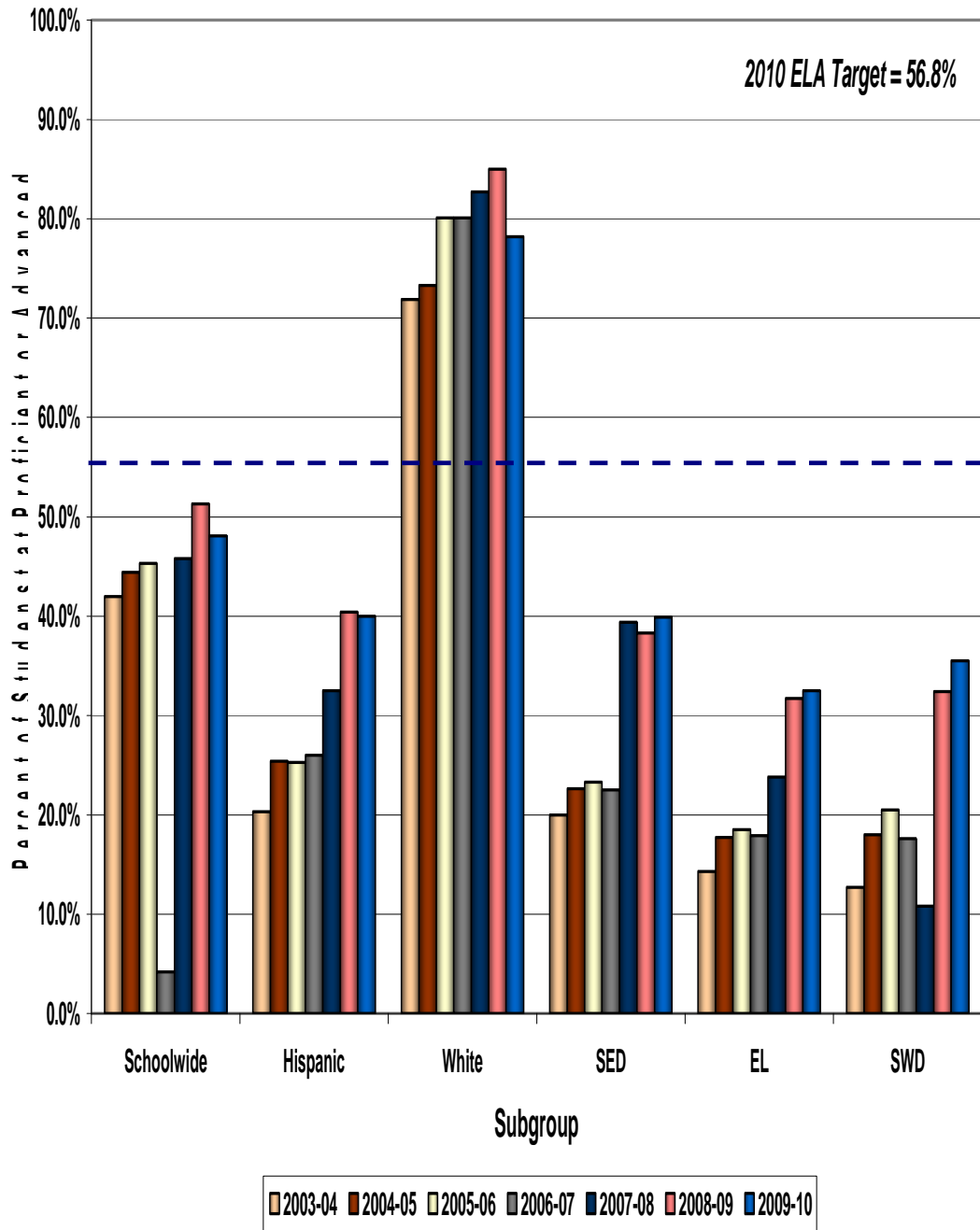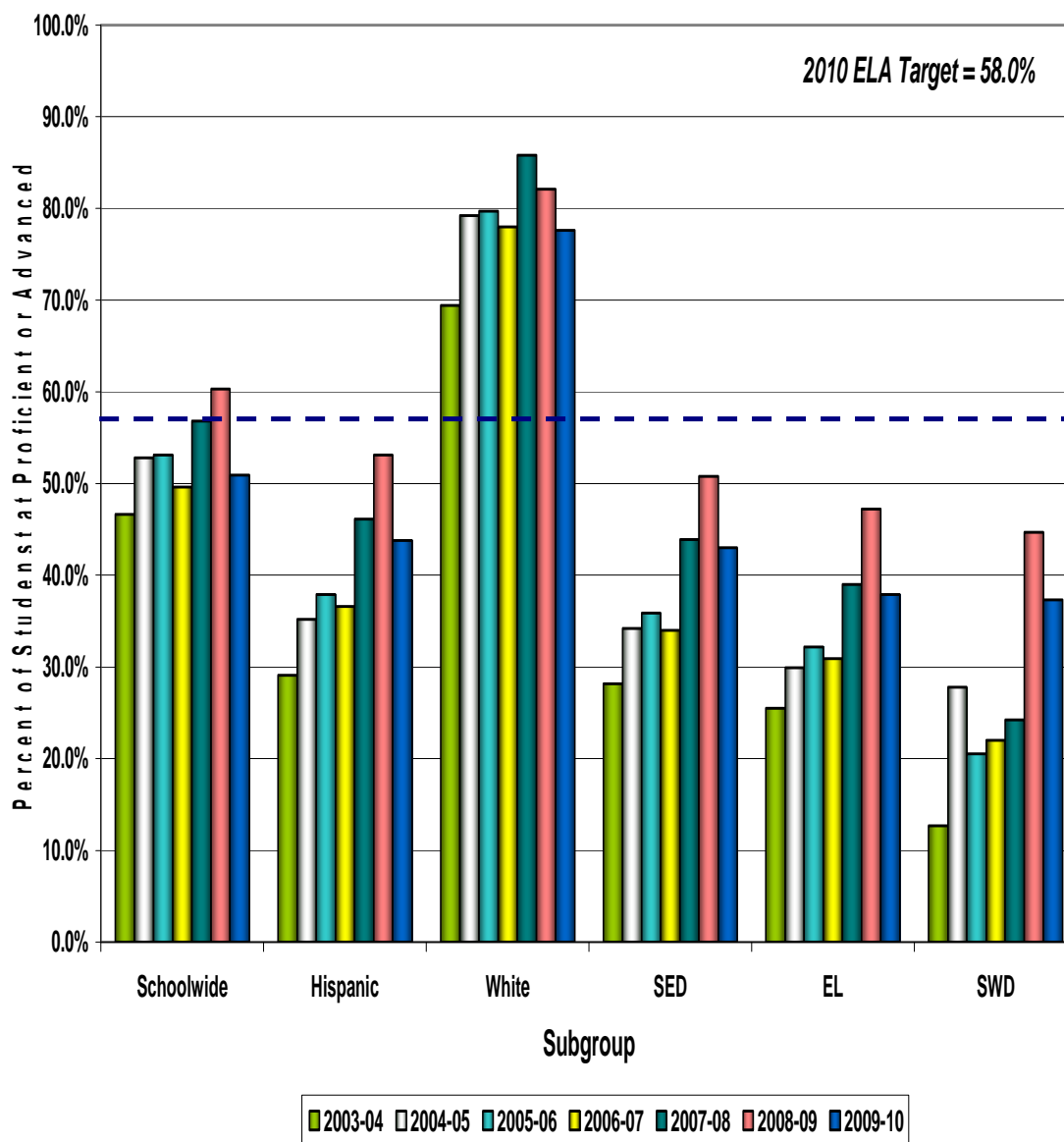

AYP Subgroup Comparison
English Language Arts
2005-2010

Table 8: AYP Mathematics 2005-2010

AYP Subgroup Comparison
Mathematics
2005-2010

The majority of teachers on this campus have been with the school for numerous years; some are even members of the founding faculty. The school opened in August of 1992 on a preexisting elementary school site, which had originally opened in 1960. Because the original elementary school had a history of low achievement and a majority Hispanic student body, the district decided to make the school into a magnet school in order to create a more diverse population.

At that time, there was federal government funding called Targeted Instructional Improvement Grant (TIIG) funds to desegregate schools (either voluntarily or through a court-ordered desegregation program) and to reform schools into magnet program schools. Magnet schools would desegregate the school population by offering a unique program of education (such as visual and performing arts) to draw families of other ethnicities from across the district. Over the course of the past nine years, the school population has slowly returned to its original demographics.

Research Design

By analyzing a group's dialogue and especially the group's choice of words, this study used the qualitative research design known as grounded theory, while also keeping in mind critical race theory (Freire, 2007), expectancy theory (Ferguson, 1998), and sociocultural theory (Gay, 2000). The intent of this research design—grounded theory—was to study a group of individuals who were interacting in a professional learning community, discussing a particular topic and observing their

process and interaction. Grounded theory also allows the researcher to come to a general theory of a process and interaction which is grounded in the views of the participants. Using inquiry, the researcher can, through the data, determine emerging themes.

Grounded theory explores social interactions and social processes in order to better understand these interactions and to create meaning. The researcher can explicate what is happening in the field setting; this inductive, comparative and interactive approach to inquiry offers several open-ended strategies for conducting emergent inquiry. Also, while analyzing data, this theory allows the researcher to be more open to emerging questions and patterns. It is less rigid and has more flexible guidelines than other research designs and is founded on the belief that knowledge may be increased by generating new themes rather than analyzing data within existing themes (Glaser, 1978). The researcher therefore is able to ask what the data suggests and from whose point of view. The researcher engages then in deductive reasoning as inquiry proceeds. The researcher has the room to develop further questions specific to the research problem and emerging analysis.

This research design was considered appropriate for this study because it involves collecting data from conversations, and developing themes of information from this data. The theory is "grounded" in this data from the participants as well as connected to the other theories discussed in Chapter 2 and used throughout this research. At the outset to gathering data regarding the perspectives of the research participants about teacher expectations and perceptions of their students, the

researcher is aware of her positionality. The researcher is very aware that she is the 'other' not just for the students on her campus but for her teachers as well. She is aware of her class and ethnic privilege as a White woman and she is also aware that her teachers may also consider her an outsider because she is "the administration". Especially in a district fraught with a history of distrust between the central office and the teachers' union, administrators are often seen as not trustworthy or no longer able to understand the position of a teacher. That is why it was also extremely important for this researcher to not be involved in the discussions and to have the discussions tape recorded and then transcribed in order to avoid some of what could manifest itself due to her positionality.

Critical race theory is also key to the research method used in this study. As with sociocultural theory, critical race theory suggests that certain structures (in the case of critical race theory, these structures have to do with the permanence of racism) govern social, political, economic and educational domains. Critical race theory differs from sociocultural theory in that it has an activist aspect. The end goal of critical race theory is to bring about change which will ensure social justice. It is used by the researcher in this study as more than just a lens but also the instrument that brings race to the central focus when examining the data in order to critique school practices that may be covertly or overtly racist.

The period of time for this research study was unavoidably shortened. Nevertheless, distinctive patterns emerged that offered meaning and insight to the teachers' beliefs.. Even though the study was curtailed and ended due to district

contract negotiations, the researcher was still able to determine patterns of language and belief.

Examining the culture of the school, and the shared patterns of language that teachers have come to use to describe groups of students, helps the researcher to understand the beliefs and behaviors of the teachers at this particular school. Through the lenses of grounded theory, critical race theory, and sociocultural theory, the researcher analyzed the shared language of the focus group.

Researchers continue to use the lens of teacher practice to bring about change in our educational system and to close the achievement gap. It is agreed that the teacher is the most important aspect of a student's achievement; however, by just looking at practice, curriculum, and strategies, we fail to see a crucial piece. For what is behavior and practice without belief and philosophy? The lens of grounded theory and critical race theory especially help us to look more pointedly at what many do not want to discuss. Since race is the evident issue of the achievement gap, any study analyzing this gap requires a research approach that identifies race as a part of the context of the study. Critical race theory must be the central lens through which a researcher examines the effects of teachers' perception on the learning outcomes and academic achievement of students.

Also using sociocultural theory, this research approach assumes that belief and practice do not develop in a vacuum; they are shaped by dominant cultural assumptions (Martin, 1994; O'Loughlin, 1995). Formal knowledge, the subject of instruction, and the manner of its presentation are influenced by the historical and

cultural environment that generated them, as well as by the individual's own perceptions of that environment.

The researcher analyzed and interpreted the group's shared patterns of beliefs through the language used when talking about students at their school. The researcher paid particular attention to the words teachers used to describe students in delineating codes. It was also hoped that the study would address the need to build awareness about the inequities created in student achievement by teachers' perceptions of their students. In order to ensure that the researcher's positionality did not interfere with the analysis of the data and the report of the findings, the researcher asked that someone who was familiar with the campus and the faculty (the assistant principal) read through the findings in order to determine if the researcher's report of the data was in any way skewed or inaccurate.

The context for this study was a particular school campus but the historical context is that of the achievement gap and the fact that across the United States there continues to be a gap—even in spite of new legislation, new curriculum and standards, and state assessments. By looking more closely at what teachers say and the words they actually use to talk about their teaching practice and about their students, the researcher hoped to get a clearer understanding of teachers' beliefs about and perceptions of their students and, more importantly, their students' academic potential.

The parent and teacher climate surveys also were used to develop an understanding of the important beliefs and attitudes of teachers and parents about SAVPA. This study employed the professional learning community method.

Professional learning communities discuss a particular topic. This methodology was chosen in order to allow participants' perceptions to conversationally emerge and their awareness of themselves and one another to be a possible outcome in the course of these conversations with their peers. It was also chosen because it was a process that teachers were already comfortable with. Comfort and familiarity were essential to the process, considering the challenging and often emotion laden topic of biases, beliefs, and expectations, to create for teachers an environment and process that they were familiar with in which they could discuss a shared experience. It has been noted by Friere (2007), Nieto (2000), Pollock (2004), Wheatley (2002), and others that conversations about race and dialogue that helps us to become aware of our own perceptions and biases are oftentimes the most challenging and difficult.

The population for this study consisted of SAVPA teachers who volunteered to be a part of this professional learning community—to discuss and to analyze the climate survey completed by SAVPA parents, as well as to discuss their own expectations, biases, and impact on student achievement. Of the 50 teachers and art specialists at SAVPA, seven teachers volunteered to participate. All seven were women, four from the elementary school and three from the middle school. The group agreed to be audiotaped during their meetings and to have the meetings observed by a person not connected with the school for the sake of recording the conversations.

Instrumentation

The forms of data collected and analyzed included anonymous climate surveys for teachers and parents and audiotaped recordings of the professional learning

community conversations, which were transcribed by an entity not associated with the school. The transcriptions were analyzed and codes emerged to determine teachers' perceptions and expectations of their students. Teachers who were a part of this study were those who volunteered to participate in ongoing biweekly conversations as a professional learning community to focus on becoming more aware of their own perceptions and expectations and impact on student achievement.

Teachers engaged in weekly conversations using the Professional Learning Community structure and BART (Boundary, Authority, Role, and Task) techniques to guide their dialogues and reflections on perceptions, expectations, and student achievement. BART is a system for group and organizational analysis that was implemented in the 1960s. When the method of learning is through experience and reflections upon one's experience, BART has been a key system used within this tradition of learning in order to prevent off-task behavior, decrease in productivity, frustration, and conflicts. Any of these problems can impede the primary task and even be quite destructive to the group. A group can more quickly achieve its task if it understands and is clear about the group's time frame for its work and its task, is given authority and assumes responsibility for the task, understands each person's role within the group, and has a clear understanding of the group's task. (Green & Molenkamp, 2005).

Data Collection Procedures

A climate survey was distributed by the district office to Globe Unified teachers and parents during the 2008-2009 school year, the year prior to the start of the

professional learning community convened for this study. The survey was developed

for the California Department of Education by WestEd, a research and development

agency. The district did not end up analyzing or using the survey results.

The results of the SAVPA parent survey indicated that 31% of SAVPA

families felt that their child was not always respected by a teacher or staff member. In

addition, 30% felt that they were not offered assistance when they entered the office.

Of the parents surveyed, 47% felt they were not given tips or help on how to help their

child study at home. More than 70% wanted parent workshops and more resources

from the school so that they could access community and support services.

Results from both the parent and teacher surveys were shared at a staff meeting

in September, 2009. Teachers sat in their grade-level teams in the school's large

performing arts center and were shown the results and given copies of the survey

questions and the results.

As a follow-up to that staff meeting and for this study, teachers were asked if

they would be interested in meeting twice a month (second and fourth Mondays of

each month) and within their contract hours (2:30-3:15 p.m.) as a professional learning

community to discuss and analyze the surveys, as well as their own teacher

expectations, biases, and the impact on student achievement. I believe it was important

that teachers had a say in these conversations and had an opportunity to participate or

not in this particular study. Because I am their principal and for many, their evaluator,

it was also important that teachers felt comfortable about volunteering or not

volunteering. I also made it clear to the staff that I would not be attending the meetings

so as not to influence their conversations and that the recorded sessions would be transcribed and I would have access to the transcriptions but not to the recordings. Their confidentiality and anonymity was important; therefore, they would not be asked to identify themselves on tape and thus would not be identified in the transcriptions. Therefore these meetings were recorded with the consent of the participants.

There were 50 potential teachers in 10 different grade-level or subject groups (K-8 grade-level teams and an arts specialist group) who could have been participants of this study. Of these 50 potential participants, 95% are female and only 5% are male. Of these, seven teachers volunteered, representing the elementary and middle schools, as well as the art specialties.

The teachers' PLC conversations were observed by an independent party who recorded their conversations. Another independent party transcribed the recordings and kept them anonymous to avoid any bias the observer may have had as a result of listening to the teachers' discussion, and so there was no voice recognition, and thus no bias created by the researcher. The researcher then analyzed the transcriptions to identify teachers' expectations and perceptions. By hand coding, the transcriptions were cataloged to determine key elements, phrases, and words that reoccurred in the conversations and created themes or patterns.

Before analyzing the transcriptions, the researcher read through the entire transcription for a basic understanding of the discussion and to determine any particular emerging themes. However, even as she read the transcription the first time through, it became apparent that the conversation focused on certain themes. In the

second reading, the researcher analyzed the transcription to determine if these themes were indeed focused upon a repetition of words, phrases, and ideas. At this point, the researcher highlighted words or phrases that reoccurred, based on the first reading, and that were also connected to what was originally perceived as the following themes: setting norms, references to students, mission or focus of SAVPA, and district contract issues. The researcher color coded words and phrases in the following manner: setting norms was blue, references to students was yellow, mission of SAVPA was pink, and district contract issues was green. The first two meetings focused exclusively on the setting of norms.

With the third reading and further analysis of what was highlighted in the second reading, the researcher looked not just at the content of the conversation but also at the frequency of the themes and particular words that reoccurred in the conversations. At this juncture, the researcher determined that there were three major themes: BART or setting norms, references to students (which conveyed the teachers' beliefs and expectations of students), and district contract issues. The researcher made interpretations based on the patterns read in the transcription. With the fourth reading, and within the highlighted areas, the researcher then underlined words and phrases that were being used repeatedly. It became clear to the researcher that the particular language used to refer to students at the school became the most evident pattern and theme in the transcription. The researcher then numbered the instances of repeated words used to describe students. The researcher also noted when the words referred to Hispanic students (by circling these in the transcription) and when they referred to

Caucasian students (by boxing in these in the transcription). When it was unclear which particular students the teachers were referring to, the researcher put a star by the reference.

After compiling the data and writing the findings, the researcher had the assistant principal, who is familiar with the school and the faculty, read over the findings in order to check that the researcher had reported the data and findings without inserting her own positionality or beliefs in the findings. Because of the sensitive nature of the findings, the researcher felt it was important that someone else read over the findings in order to ensure impartiality.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions and expectations of their minority and low-socioeconomic students?

2. To what degree do teachers recognize their biases?

To understand the data and findings, important information follows that provides a contextual background about the particular environment during the year in which the data were collected. Distractions and detours from the intended PLC topic occurred largely as a result of teacher contract negotiations, which were under way during this same time period. It was also during this time that contract negotiations came to an impasse and the possibility of a strike became imminent. Even though conversations strayed from the topic as a result of contract negotiations, participants' comments still clearly delineated their beliefs and biases.

History and Focus of PLCs in the District and on Site

For the past three years, since the inception of PLCs within the Globe Unified School District, SAVPA teachers have been directed by the district and/or their principal to focus their conversations on analyzing student data (from CST scores to district assessments) and to use the data to discuss and collaborate on ways to improve student achievement.

During the first year (2007-2008) that PLCs were employed at SAVPA, they were organized and facilitated under the direction of the previous principal and literacy coach. SAVPA, using its own budget, hired a literacy coach (before the district required this position at all elementary schools in the district) to help grade-level teams examine English Language Arts (ELA) data to prepare for district assessments and CST, and to coach teachers who wanted and needed additional support in ELA instruction. After school, teachers met in grade-level teams to analyze student data and to discuss student performance. The teams looked over CST data results and results from quarterly district assessments.

In the second year (2008-2009) that PLCs were employed, under direction of a new principal and with the help of the literacy coach, the grade-level teams continued to work as PLCs, continued to analyze student data, and focused their attention on arts integration (the focus of the magnet school) in order to better engage and to motivate the students—all with the direct goal of improving student achievement.

Data were collected the third year that PLCs had been implemented both districtwide and schoolwide (2009-2010). The direction and focus of the PLCs for this particular year had been mandated by the district to focus on CST data and on improving the achievement gap and student achievement by focusing on reading comprehension, especially for those subgroups not doing well districtwide. In particular, the focus was on English Language Learners, low-socioeconomic students, Hispanics, and special education students. The district also wanted each school site and the site's PLC teams to prepare for the DAIT (District Assistance Intervention

Team, a state requirement of districts in program improvement) and district learning walks (teams that observed classroom teachers for seven minutes and then compiled data on what they observed as schoolwide trends) that would occur throughout that year on all district campuses. It was during this particular year that the district instituted the required position of literacy coach on all elementary campuses and facilitated trainings for all teachers in this position.

Learning walks consisted of teams of administrators—from a DAIT team, the Globe district office, principals from other school sites within the district, the visited school's principal and assistant principal, the school's literacy coach, and two to three teachers on staff. In five-to-seven-minute increments, teams of four to five learning walk observers visited classrooms. The teams gathered information on student engagement and learning activities. After classroom visitations, the team discussed what they had observed and determined schoolwide trends. SAVPA's learning walks occurred in March and May of 2010.

Data to Be Used in Initial Professional Learning Community Dialogue

At the end of the 2008-2009 school year, the district distributed a parent survey to all parents within the district, as well as a teacher survey to all its teachers within the district. These two surveys are companion surveys to the California Healthy Kids Survey required by the California Department of Education (CDE) for all schools that receive Title V state funds. The survey was developed for CDE by WestEd. When the parent survey results data was shared at a staff meeting in September 2009, several

teachers disagreed with or fought to rationale the findings. This reaction—as well as those of the teacher survey results, which conflicted with the results of the parent survey—alerted the researcher that there was a divide between the perceptions of parents and beliefs of teachers about what was offered and done on behalf of students and parents. The parent survey results spoke to a different perception of the campus and teachers than the teachers' perceptions. The parent survey indicated that 31% of SAVPA families felt that their child was not always respected by a teacher or staff member. Of the parents surveyed, 47% felt they were not given tips or help on how to help their child study at home. This conflicted with the teachers' results that spoke to preparing every child for academic success.

All teacher respondents, except for one, reported that they "promote academic success for all students." Yet less (80%) considered "closing the racial/ethnic achievement gap a high priority." And even more (46%) responded that students at the school were not "motivated to learn." This discrepancy between what the parents reported and the teachers reported gave rise to questions about perception for the researcher.

The Environment in which the Professional Learning Community Met: District Negotiations

In the early stages of this study, exacerbating circumstances occurred, which undoubtedly affected this study's data to some extent. GUSD certificated teachers, represented by their union Globe Teachers' Association (GTA), and classified workers

represented by their union California School Employees Association (CSEA), were

undergoing contract negotiations during the 2009-2010 school year. Because of

California state budget cuts to education and the declining enrollment in GUSD, the

negotiations focused on lack of funds, increasing class sizes, medical benefits, five

furlough days, the continued elimination of one staff development day (which

occurred during the 2009-2010 school year, along with a second staff development

day during the 2010-2011 school year) and possible pay cuts. A district budget

advisory committee was created. The committee first met in December 2008 and

continued meeting through June 22, 2010. Their agenda and meeting minutes were

made available on the district website.

As a result of continuing distrust between the unions and the district office,

negotiations came to an impasse and an outside mediator was called in. An impasse is

a step in the labor negotiation's process that leads to involvement of outside parties to

try to reach resolution. As a result, the negotiations were stalled while fact-finding and

mediation sessions were under way. Prior to this impasse teachers began to show

support of their union by wearing all black on Fridays. They also attended board

meetings in large groups and voiced a no-confidence vote for the district's

superintendent. As the atmosphere became more heated, teachers agreed to only teach

their classes and to do nothing beyond their contract hours or assigned duties; this

meant that teachers showed their discontent with the negotiations by not facilitating or

participating in after-school or co-curricular activities with students as well as on

district committees and in school meetings that met beyond their contractual day. They

also showed their disapproval of the possibility of class size increases by wearing black T-shirts that read "Increased Class Sizes" within a large yellow circle and had a yellow slash through the circle and wording. It was within this environment that the SAVPA professional learning community began and came to an end before its originally agreed upon end date.

The Professional Learning Community

Prior to the teachers' refusal to participate in school activities, events, and meetings that occurred beyond their contractual hours, the professional learning community (PLC) group did begin to meet. The PLC group was made up of seven SAVPA female teachers, out of the 50 teachers and art specialists at the school. Four of the teachers were from the elementary grades and three from the middle school grades. The group's first task, at their first meeting on January 25, 2010, was to establish group norms and to look at the past history and population of the campus and its present reality, as well as to discuss the parent survey results. Along with establishing group norms, the PLC group would also implement the BART system of group and organizational analysis. The researcher had given each member of the PLC group a photocopy of the BART system to read prior to the first meeting. It was hoped that the group would begin their discussion by analyzing group and individual dynamics and looking at BART in order to better facilitate their group and individual work. By first determining their boundary (time and space of work), authority (clearly defined and tools needed to complete the task), role (duties to be performed), and task

(agreed upon perception of the work), it was believed—and the research supports this—that their work would be more focused and they would be able to accomplish more as a result. Once this group analysis had been completed and roles and task determined, the group was to examine the history and present reality of the campus, and then review the climate survey.

Subsequent meetings would have them discuss student achievement within the context of their own biases, perceptions, and expectations of their students. The conversations at each of the meetings were to be recorded and were then to be analyzed to determine common themes. The recordings made by the independent observer would then be turned over to an independent transcriber who made a transcription of the recordings of the PLC conversations. This transcription would then be organized by the researcher into themes or categories when themes presented themselves.

The observer kept his own biases out of the research by just being there to ensure that the conversations were recorded. He was not a teacher or staff member on the campus and was not known by any of those in the PLC group. At the first meeting he explained that he was just there to see that the conversations were recorded. Participants were allowed to facilitate their own conversations and to express and determine their views of the issue of teacher perception and student achievement. As a result, it was believed that this study would be an emergent one based on what the participants' learned and discovered about their own teaching perceptions and beliefs and the perceptions and beliefs about teaching and students of their peers.

Beginning on Monday, January 25, the PLC group met in a classroom on campus (determined by the group in an email exchange the week prior to the first meeting) and sat at tables arranged into a square. According to the transcription, the group spent its first two meetings determining group norms and implementing the BART system of group and organizational analysis. They began the first meeting by discussing and coming to consensus on the question "What do you need to be able to participate fully in this professional learning community?" The question was posed by the researcher through the PLC observer in order to facilitate the group in determining group norms.

The group allowed each individual participant to give their answer to the above question. As they started, a participant in the group volunteered to write down their answers on a large poster-size piece of paper. They spent a little more than 20 minutes sharing their ideas for group norms. After someone repeated what had been written down, the groups agreed to and determined the following group norms:

- begin on time

- have time to complete tasks

- trust one another

- use confidentiality

- be open to new ideas

- bring ideas and not just complaints

- develop and implement an action plan

- be understanding and respectful of others' ideas

- be an active listener

- be optimistic

- look at the bigger picture

- maintain school vision

- develop a focus for each meeting

- hold no side conversations

The group then began to discuss group and individual dynamics by looking at

BART in order to better facilitate their group and individual work. The observer

provided a handout with definitions of these terms the week prior to their first

meeting. By first determining their boundary, authority, role, and task, it was

believed—and the research supports this—that their work would be more focused and

they would be able to accomplish more as a result. This discussion took up the

remaining time of the first meeting, as well as the entire time and focus of the second

meeting, for a total of one and a half hours. The group was quickly able to determine

their boundary and authority, which took approximately 20 minutes. They agreed that

their meetings would be held twice a month (second and fourth Monday of each

month) and within their contractual hours (2:30 to 3:15 p.m.) as a professional

learning community to discuss and to analyze the climate survey completed by

SAVPA parents and to discuss their expectations, biases, and the impact on student

achievement (as had been suggested to them by the researcher when she first met with

those who volunteered to be a part of the PLC). They agreed to meet in the same teacher's classroom for all meetings. They all had copies of the parent climate survey that they agreed to bring with them to the following meeting along with the school's CST data.

The group became immersed, and perhaps even took more time than the researcher had originally predicted, in dialogue on the "Role (duties to be performed), and the Task (agreed upon perception of the work)" aspect of the BART system. In beginning to talk about these two elements, a teacher asked the group, "Before we talk about our role and task, shouldn't we decide about who is involved in these meetings? I mean, should it just be the group of us who are here now or should the group be open each time we meet to anyone who wants to show up?" This point became their focus for the rest of the meeting and even the entire focus of their second meeting, for a total of 60 minutes. The group explored the pros and cons of allowing open attendance or keeping the group membership to only those who attended this first meeting. Comments such as, "There are only seven of us and we don't represent all the grade levels" to "It would be too confusing to have to restate and explain things to someone new each time we meet" were the general sentiments of the group and the division within the group.

Initially some wanted to have "open" meetings but this sentiment changed as the group came to a consensus that it was important for maintaining "trust and confidentiality" to keep to those who were currently in the group. Some also felt that with too large a group, they wouldn't be able to "get anything done." One participant

also expressed (in reference to other possible participants) that, "If they had wanted to be involved, they would have come to this first meeting." Another participant responded that, "Maybe the date and time of this first meeting wasn't good for them." "Someone might want to come when they can and not make a total commitment." As stated above, the group finally decided that they would limit the group to those who had volunteered initially and showed up at the first meeting.

Once the BART group analysis had been completed and roles and task determined, it was the intention that the group would look over the climate survey and discuss what they felt was significant in the survey, and from there go on to discuss their own perceptions and expectations of their students. This did not occur; the researcher assumes this is because of contract negotiations that began to focus on class sizes. The district was taking the position of increasing class sizes due to budget cuts and the teachers were fighting for the present class sizes agreed to in their last contract negotiation. What happened then in the PLC were discussions on class size and how that would impact their teaching and student learning. This was most likely a direct result of the contract negotiation coming to an impasse and to the concern of their union about the perceived "threat" of increased class sizes (which became a reality for the upcoming school year and, according to contract, would last until the 2012-2013 school year). This dialogue consumed the focus of the third meeting. While the focus of the dialogue strayed from the climate survey, participant comments regarding class size clearly indicated their biases. It was during these comments that the participants

brought up the concern about the students attending the school from the neighborhood and "not being here for the arts."

At the fourth meeting, the group recapped their prior meeting discussion and decided to refocus on their task by bringing up the school's mission statement. The school's mission statement is: "The staff at Shakespeare Academy of Visual and Performing Arts is committed to educating all children in an environment which encourages creativity, self-awareness, and self-expression through an appreciation of the visual and performing arts." At this point, one teacher expressed her feelings that many of the students were not at SAVPA for the "right reason."

The discussion became focused on the perceived "fact" that so many students were not at the school for the arts and were behavior problems as a result. Teachers defined these students as "those" who "did not fully participate." Full participation was never clearly defined, instead the teachers talked about students who were "disruptive" or "don't complete work," which could have nothing to do with the arts. The conversation quickly changed to what could be done about this and turned toward having a better recruitment/acceptance procedure, as well as a system of getting rid of "those students." Again, this referred to students who were not perceived as participating in the arts. This reference to the arts occurred 15 times during the course of the conversations. The researcher hand-coded the meeting transcriptions for words like "student(s)," "those," and "they."

The fifth and final meeting continued the discussion about acceptance and "removal" procedures. References to these procedures occurred 33 times over the

course of these two last meetings. They concluded this meeting with deciding that they would no longer meet. This decision came as a direct result of the ongoing contract negotiations and union recommendation for teachers to discontinue participation in all activities except the classes they taught and to work within their contractual work hours.

The meetings were only held a total of five times as a result of the "work slow down" determined by the union. Some members of the group wanted to continue to meet but others felt that to do that would be going against what the union was trying to accomplish. They reached an agreement that they would discontinue the meetings. The last meeting was held on Monday, March 22, 2010. This was also the week prior to their two-week spring break and just prior to California State Testing—perhaps another reason that the group ended, as a result of missing two weeks of meetings and upcoming state testing.

The researcher is aware that her interpretation of the data and of what she read (the transcription) are filtered through her own lens; however, it is important that this researcher remain as unbiased as possible to allow the participants their own experience and understanding to unfold. However, the researcher is using a different theoretical lens to interpret data. Through the lenses of grounded theory, critical race theory, and sociocultural theory, the researcher analyzed the shared language of the focus group. The intent of this research design—grounded theory—was to study a group of individuals who were interacting in a professional learning community, discussing a particular topic and determining emergent themes.

Analysis

  The professional learning community was recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed by a person other than the facilitator and the researcher. The researcher then read the transcription. The first two meetings focused exclusively on the setting of norms.

  With the third reading of the transcription and further analysis of what was highlighted in the second reading of the transcription, the researcher looked not just at the content of the PLC conversation but also at the frequency of the themes and particular words that reoccurred in the conversations. At this juncture, the researcher determined three major themes: BART, references to students (which conveyed the teachers' beliefs and expectations of students), and district contract issues. The researcher made interpretations based on the patterns read in the transcription. The language used to refer to students at the school became the most evident pattern and theme in the transcription. The following sections discuss the findings and conclusions for the three major themes mentioned above.

BART

  As was stated earlier, the first two meetings focused on developing norms and addressing the four elements of group analysis work: Boundary, Authority, Role, and Task (BART). Boundary is the space in which work happens in the group. This

includes time and place of the work. Questions that came up at the first meeting—

"How often will we meet?" and "Where should we meet?"—were discussed and it was

determined that the group would meet once a week and in the same teacher's

classroom for consistency and ease.

The group's conversation became more focused on the elements of authority,

role, and task. Authority is defined as the responsibility and accountability of the

group. People occupy roles. Authority and role of the group were challenging issues

for the group. Questions that were brought up included: "Should we allow others to

join the group at any time?" "Are we representative of the school as a whole?"

"Should we appoint a facilitator?" "Besides being tape-recorded, is someone going to

take notes? Do we feel that's needed?" "Should we have an agenda for each meeting?"

More than 30 minutes were spent discussing the group membership. Two

teachers felt that "If we allow others to come whenever they want, then the

conversation will become repetitive. We'll have to re-cover what we already talked

about at a previous meeting so that any one coming in for the first time would

understand the conversation."

"Yes, I agree. That's a problem. But there aren't very many of us here and

maybe someone would want to attend to hear what we are talking about and to offer

new ideas."

"I don't feel comfortable just allowing people to come and go. We made a

commitment and since others weren't willing to make that same commitment, they

shouldn't be allowed to just jump in whenever."

It was determined that the group would not allow newcomers. They also felt that although they were a small group, they represented the different grades of the school (elementary and middle school representation) as well as the special education program and the art specialists. The group was comfortable with their representation. Finally, it was hoped that a clear understanding of the task before the group would help to focus the work; however, this didn't seem to be the case. The researcher believes it is important to establish norms and to understand the boundary, authority, role, and task of the work but moving this work faster is also believed to be key to the group's process, especially when discussing controversial or difficult issues. If a group gets sidetracked or is using process issues as a way to avoid the real work, this can be detrimental to the group's objective and it can even derail the group from the real work at hand.

District Contract Issues

What finally became the primary concern of the group or at least what, in the researcher's conclusions, derailed the group and brought about the end of any conversation were the concerns about the district contract negotiations. The PLC became focused on class size and how increased class sizes would impact their ability to teach all of their students effectively. Whether this was just an excuse to avoid the deeper issue of race or whether participants were becoming too uncomfortable with the conversation is difficult to determine.

References to Students

Only a few times did the participants refer to students by name. The participants never referred to students as "our students." Participants most frequently referred to SAVPA students using the pronouns they, them, or those or just "students." During their third, fourth, and the final fifth meetings, this pronoun usage occurred 103 times. Of these 103 incidences, 94 referred to the neighborhood Hispanic students at SAVPA.

It became apparent to the researcher that a "coded language" was occurring in reference to the Hispanic students at SAVPA. Rather than refer to them as "students" or Hispanic youth or English Language Learners, teachers referred to them as "students from the neighborhood" or "those who live close by"—but it was clear that their intent and meaning was about the Hispanic youth at SAVPA. Not all of SAVPA's Hispanic students are from the surrounding neighborhood; however, the majority are from the school's neighborhood. This way of identifying the students is believed to be a form of racism—referring to students as "other"—not students who "enjoy the arts" or "do well in school," which was how they spoke of the Caucasian students that they actually named. It was also apparent that the teachers had lower expectations of and negative beliefs about "those" students' academic and artistic ability.

Banks and McGee Banks (1999) believed that

educational equality, like liberty and justice, are ideals toward which human beings work but never fully attain. Racism, sexism, and discrimination against people with disabilities will exist to some extent

no matter how hard we work to eliminate these problems. When prejudice and discrimination are reduced toward one group, they are usually directed toward another group or they take new forms. Whenever groups are identified and labeled, categorization occurs. When categorization occurs, members of in-groups favor in-group members and discriminate against out-groups. (p. 4)

The predominate in-group at SAVPA are the Caucasian teachers. The researcher believes that the teachers would defend their position about students at the school and would refute any evidence of racism. Even so, the "othering" of Hispanic students and the notion of teachers' colorblindness fails to take into consideration racism within the structure of education; this stance ignores the fact that inequity and oppression exist and as a result will not be remedied or eliminated if race continues to be ignored or not dealt with.

On yet another reading of the transcript, especially with regards to the theme of SAVPA students, it became clear that these conversations could be broken down still further into two themes: teacher expectations and the school as an art magnet school. Both of these conversation themes seem to be used as a way to avoid the issue of race.

Teacher Expectations

It was clear to the researcher that students identified by the teachers as, "students who want to be here" were the students whose parents drive them to the school. These are students who may live in the city of Globe but not within the neighborhood that is the closest proximity to the school. These are students who "fit" the preferred and perceived characteristics of students the teachers would like to see

attend the school. They are students who teachers perceive are interested in the arts because their parents are willing to drive them to school.

In a November 2010 *Educational Leadership* article entitled "Got Opportunity," authors Quaglia, Fox, and Corso state that there are two kinds of "expectation gaps." First, teachers have different expectations for their individual students. Teachers do not carry the same assumptions about a student's potential for each student they teach. In fact, very few teachers feel that schools should expect all students to be capable of going on to college (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Balfanz, 2009). "The second expectations gap involves the difference between students' expectations of themselves and what they perceive to be teachers' opinion of their potential" (Quaglia, Fox & Corso, 2010).

The participants talked about a "large number of students who do not care about school. They do not do their homework." This portion of the conversation lasted more than 30 minutes, discussing students "who don't participate in class" and "no one's at home to help them or even could help them if they were home." "Their parents don't speak English" and "Most of the parents didn't even finish school themselves." The participants talked about the difficulty of teaching students who "don't want to be here" and, as a result, become classroom behavior issues.

"They don't want to learn."

"Some of them don't even try."

"There's not much I can do to help a student who can't read or is three years below their grade level."

"I can't speak Spanish so how can I let their parents know they aren't turning in their work?"

"Why are they even here if they don't like art?" Sometimes it was difficult for the researcher to distinguish between teachers' biases and perceptions of students and what they felt was the focus of the school—the arts.

School as an Arts Magnet School

Teachers used the school's designation as an arts magnet school to justify the removal or denial of admission to certain students. One teacher asked, "How are students being screened to attend SAVPA?" Another added to that question by asking, "Is their interest or lack of interest in the arts being taken into consideration?" Teachers talked about being "concerned that students are being admitted to our school who are not interested in the arts."

It was discussed that "the ideal would be that students are proficient in English and they should be committed to an art education." "Why are we admitting students who aren't academically proficient? Couldn't we have them do a writing piece as part of the admission process?" This statement could be driven by the high-stakes testing environment in which schools now operate.

Many teachers are operating under the fear that they are evaluated solely on their class results on the California State Tests. Much of their concern about the students who are in their classes may be a result of school's increased accountability. As a program improvement school, this scrutiny and accountability is increased.

However, having stated that and the fact that these teachers were also under the additional stress of contract negotiations—knowing their jobs were at risk, as was their rate of pay and health insurance—the researcher believes that their expectations about their students' academic potential were skewed by their beliefs about Hispanic students as a whole.

Summary of Findings

The process for analyzing the transcriptions of the PLC group discussions followed the grounded theory approach. The researcher, while listening to the transcriptions of the PLC group, listened for themes of information (grounded theory), especially with regards to the group's use of language and what this revealed about their perceptions of students and studied these patterns in word usage and in themes to derive at meaning.

In the first PLC the research participants convened, the teachers came to consensus on the norms they would follow for upcoming meetings. They determined their boundary and authority, the first two aspects of the BART system. The second meeting continued this dialogue about BART, specifically determining the remaining two aspects of the BART system – their role and task. The group became immersed, and perhaps even took more time than the researcher had originally predicted, in dialogue on the "Role (duties to be performed), and the Task (agreed upon perception of the work)" aspect of the BART system.

What happened then in the third PLC meeting were discussions on class size and how that would impact their teaching and student learning. This was most likely a direct result of the contract negotiation coming to an impasse and to the concern of their union about the perceived "threat" of increased class sizes. This dialogue consumed the focus of this third meeting. While the focus of the dialogue strayed from the climate survey, participant comments regarding class size clearly indicated their biases. It was during these comments that the participants brought up the concern about the students attending the school from the neighborhood and "not being here for the arts." At the fourth meeting, the group recapped their prior meeting discussion, and decided to refocus on their task by bringing up the school's mission statement. The fifth and final meeting found the group immersed in the topic of how to remove students from the school who were not interested in the arts. This was their final meeting because of their decision to align themselves with their union's decision to begin a "work slow down."

It was in the last three meetings' transcripts that the researcher found evidence of ninety-four negative references to Hispanic students out of 103 references to SAVPA students. It was clear to the researcher that the discussions contained coded language. Teachers never referred to Caucasian students as not being interested in the arts, only the Hispanic students were perceived as being at the school because of proximity and not because of the school's magnet focus.

CHAPTER 5

A CALL TO ACTION

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions:

  1. What are teachers' perceptions and expectations of their

     minority and low-socioeconomic students?

  2. To what degree do teachers recognize their biases?

  3. When teachers are aware of the effects of their perceptions and

     expectations on student achievement can they and how do they change

     inadvertent behaviors?

The study did not accomplish this purpose. The study did inform the researcher about the importance and difficulty of conversations involving race, perception, and expectation. Americans are not known for dealing with the issue of race head-on. This was evidenced by the fact that the group never discussed teacher perceptions and expectations of their students but instead talked about establishing norms, determining their task as a PLC, and then discussed possible class size increases and their views on students who were at the school who really shouldn't be there. The group spent two meetings discussing these last mentioned concerns and what procedures that could be put in place to remove students who weren't there for the arts.

This was my second year as a principal and my second year at SAVPA. As such, some of the data could have been influenced due to teachers' reluctance to be honest or open with someone new and in a position of perceived and real authority, even though I did not attend the meetings.

The researcher is aware that her interpretation of the data and of what she read

(transcription) are filtered through her own lens. The researcher used the critical race

and sociocultural theoretical lenses to interpret data. By analyzing a group's dialogue

and especially the group's choice of words, this study used the qualitative research

design known as grounded theory, while also keeping in mind critical race theory

(Freire, 2007), expectancy theory (Ferguson, 1998), and sociocultural theory (Gay,

2000). The intent of this research design—grounded theory—was to study a group of

individuals who were interacting in a professional learning community to discuss a

particular topic. By using this lens, the researcher studied the group's use of language

and what this implied about their perceptions and expectations of their students. The

researcher then studied the patterns of meaning in order to determine the perceptions

and expectations that teachers had of their Hispanic students. It became clear quickly

that the teachers had particular perceptions of their Hispanic students which impacted

their expectations of these students. For the most part, they did not believe that their

Hispanic students were at the school for "the right reason"- there for the arts. They

saw their attendance at the school as being contrary to the purpose and focus of the

school and as a result caused problems in behavior and focus. The researcher believed

that this was all coded language for considering Hispanics as "other" and also

indicated a particular attitude toward the Hispanic students on the campus.

Race matters—this can be seen historically in the United States. Racial

membership was the basis for denying people the right to vote, the right to own

property, and why people were denied the basic rights of citizenship and treated as the

property of others. Yet race is still a topic that is often avoided and causes great debate and emotional outbursts. The researcher believed that working on norms and BART would help the group to deal more effectively with the issue of race. Instead, it became an alternative focus of the group.

It is clear to the researcher that such conversations take time and a facilitator's expertise in keeping the group focused and on task with regards to that topic is critical. As a principal, it is important to guide teams of teachers within professional learning communities to create a safe and trusting environment where teachers can talk about such challenging and often disturbing issues.

Many people have an almost visceral reaction to the terms racist and racism. There is a gut reaction and speedy denial of any allegations or such wrongdoing on an educator's part. Teachers will claim they are "colorblind" and treat all their students the same or they will state and strongly believe that they treat all students equitably (Allen, 1999; Pollock, 2004). However, this "othering" of people and "colorblindness" ignores the fact that inequality, inopportunity and oppression are indeed operating in our society of which our educational system is a part. It can be argued that the achievement gap largely exists due to misperceptions, different expectations, and biases that teachers have (even if unconsciously) of their Hispanic students, as well as of their non-White students (Banks & McGee Banks, 1999; Cammarota, 2007; Darder & Torres, 2000; Good, 1987; Haycock, 2006; Merton, 1948).

Few members of the school staff in this study seemed to understand the need to analyze the organizational context and the underlying assumptions on which

classroom and school practices are based. Many did not seem to be consciously aware of the hidden curriculum. This curriculum may be defined as the norms, beliefs, and attitudes reflected in the school's practices and the behavior of teachers and administrators toward students.

Teachers expect that when a child enters the school system the child will be equipped with certain skills and experiences necessary for school success. These skills would include such behaviors as the abilities to follow directions, express oneself, self-control, and cooperation, as well as other interpersonal skills. But these are often defined differently from teacher to teacher. When these skills do not manifest, teachers will quickly label a student's "lack" as a deficiency—a deficiency in their upbringing, their culture, their parents, their socioeconomic situation. Teacher expectations then, even among their students, may vary.

It is this discrepancy in a teacher's perception of students' potential, as well as the impact this has on students, that is cause for alarm. Research has shown time and time again (Haycock, 2002, 2006; Marzano, 2003) that it is the teacher who makes the difference in student achievement; however, we still have not taken a critical look at the culture that has produced our teachers and that continues to shape their craft.

Schools are socializing agencies for both educators and students, and the content and context of that socialization are very powerful. As a result of a series of educational practices, educational outcomes are affected. When practices manifest low expectations, watered-down curriculum, and inappropriate instructional strategies, low achievement is the likely outcome. Such practices have become time-honored and

institutionalized, as administrators, teachers, parents, and students become accustomed to and participate in them. In the end, when these ingrained institutional behaviors are allowed to persist, a cultural pedagogy of low achievement also continues (Haberman, 1996).

Culturally responsive teaching, learning, and schools are a necessary response to reverse these patterns of low achievement. In order to create a culturally responsive teaching model there must be whole-school inquiry, which requires multiple layers of reflection and investigation by the school community (Banks & McGee Banks, 1999; Brown & Isaacs, 2005; Copland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

A Call to Action

This research is critical and is a call to action to bring about needed change in the way teachers perceive their students' abilities and in the way they express these perceptions and beliefs to their students and among their colleagues. The findings in this study create a sense of urgency within the educational community to challenge our inequitable systems and to call for a transformation that will create effective learning environments for all students. More research is essential concerning culturally responsive teaching, the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement, and overcoming barriers to critical conversations to bring about the change that will ultimately close the achievement gap.

School leaders, administrators, teachers, and district office personnel must not just depend upon implementing new programs or strategies to bring about closing the achievement gap. They must also take a critical look at teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities. The best of programs will continue to fail if the teacher does not believe a student can benefit from the program.

This particular study examined the language teachers used, especially when referring to their Hispanic students. The researcher is aware that to study language—which in itself is rooted in systems of oppression—is a paradox. Using such language to build awareness and to frame conversations about closing the achievement gap is inherently troubled. Because each of us is steeped in our own culture, the researcher also had to keep in mind her own cultural bias, her own perceptions and expectations, and her own use of language when listening to the transcribed conversations of others.

There is also the difficulty and even danger of transparency and honesty, especially with regards to issues of race within and in front of a group. Will the participants in the conversations be able to discuss issues of race openly? Can we even be honest with ourselves that this is the difference that plays into our perceptions and thus our behavior toward our students? Discussions about race are often perceived as "dangerous" or at least uncomfortable. As a result, will teachers honestly express their expectations about their students, especially their Hispanic students? Will they honestly report what they feel each of their students' potential is and why? And even if they do, will they say the differences in potential rest on parents, socioeconomics, etc., and are not things they can control or change? In this study, teachers made comments

like, "Their parents can't help them with school because they haven't had much of an education themselves." "And there's a language barrier. They can't speak English and this is a problem." "They (the students) just don't care about school." These attitudes were prevalent throughout their conversations. It often sounded like the teachers didn't feel they had much control or power to bring about change in their students' behavior or academic achievement.

Critical race theorists (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Freire, 2007; Giroux, 1985) believe that racism is so much a part of our culture that it appears normal, as evident in the educational system's power to continue to oppress and marginalize groups of students. White privilege has become so insidious, so much the norm, that it has become our way of knowing and understanding the world in which we live. However, critical race theorists also believe in the potential of the American educational system to do the opposite of what it has been doing and that it can empower our youth to transform the system and our society. Our beliefs emerge through our use of language and through our behavior. Students can see quickly and clearly where they stand with their teachers. In order for education to become transformative, we must be willing to raise our consciousness and become critically aware of our expectations and beliefs about our students.

Raising critical consciousness of educators is paramount so that we grapple with the very real impact that racism continues to have in our educational system and within our society. We have to challenge the racism that exists in the system, ask questions, and continuously examine our assumptions in order to truly promote equity

and to truly have a democratic educational system. Education is political; it is not a neutral institution according to Freire's (2007) work that states that schools either support the existing systems or transform them. Persistence of the achievement gap could be evidence that schools are supporting the existing social orders rather than transforming them. Teachers continue to wear blinders or are "colorblind" to the issues of race within their classroom and in their practice due to their own cultural and educational experiences as a way to deny racism and justify inequities because "this is just the way things are."

In this study, the blinders were exhibited as avoidance behaviors manifested in the unusual amount of time spent on setting norms for the conversations and the relative ease with which the real issues were subverted by veering to other topics. Discussing admittance and removal procedures was another way to avoid issues of race and the deeper critical analysis of differing expectations of our individual students' academic performance.

To interrupt the beliefs that inhibit progress in facing and altering behaviors that exacerbate the problem and serve to substantiate the status quo, educators must confront their biases. The achievement gap will persist without this type of interruption. Professional Learning Communities can provide the means to this end. In the 2010-2011 school year, all schools within GUSD will have an early release once a week. The intended use of this early release is to provide all district teachers with time to meet as professional learning communities. These opportunities to learn—to study, to analyze, and to reflect upon data, practice, and student work—will be part of the

routine organization of each teacher's workday and work year; this type of

collaboration and dialogue is, by far, the better professional development practice,

according to many researchers. Instead of a "one size fits all" staff development

training model, professional learning communities can engage and support teachers

where they are at in the context of their own teaching and experience. This will

hopefully offer meaningful engagement with ideas and with colleagues. It will be my

job to help teachers to use the techniques of inquiry and to help them in "deepening

the discussion, open the debates and enrich the array of possibilities for action" (Little,

1994, p. 40).

Research by Rosenholtz (1989) and Fullan (1993) found that teachers who

were supported with time built into their daily schedules so that there was ongoing

learning and development and whose opinions were sought after and listened to were

more committed and more likely to change their behavior than those who did not

experience such support or feel that their opinions were valued.

Boyd (1991) identified positive teacher attitudes toward teaching and their

students. Boyd concluded that when these positive attitudes are in place, there is a

greater possibility of change. Louis and Kruse (1995) talk about reflective dialogue

and the importance of the willingness to share and accept feedback in working toward

school improvement. These human factors are essential in the actions we take to enact

the change necessary for school improvement and closing the achievement gap.

Add to the above, the systemic visiting of classrooms—providing teachers with

the opportunity to observe one another in practice, along with the time to share what

they know, and time to consult about challenges faced with teaching and learning—and you will see change occur. As we open up our practice and beliefs, we will leave isolation to become a collaborative and transformative system. This also sets the stage for defining what good teaching and classroom practice look like (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). This, along with Darling-Hammond's study (2007), suggests that when teachers share in decision making and have opportunities for collaborative inquiry, their teaching improves. Structured teacher collaboration can bring about school improvement. These collaborative teams must focus on learning and also must accept collective responsibility for the learning of all students.

The first step of these collaborative teams must be to assess the current state of the school. In addition to examining test score data, an assessment of the state of the school involves probing in other aspects of the educational setting. An important first step would be to probe into the perceptions about why the school is in its particular current state. It means asking the hard questions: What are we doing? What is working? What is it not working, and for which students? It also means honestly comparing and/or supporting the perceptions of those issues with data and evidence.

In the call to action, educators must critically evaluate the services they offer students and how they are performed. Questions about practice should lead not to pointing fingers at parents or students as the problem, but to identifying institutional policies and practices that affect student achievement. This requires individual and collective reflection. Saavedra (1993) suggests using teacher study groups to create changes in teachers' beliefs and practices. Teachers study in context. This provides a

rich opportunity for teachers to examine their own cultural, social, and political identities. Saavedra states, "In other words, through understanding their world and themselves with their world, teachers engage in the process of creating and shifting knowledge, meanings, ideologies and practices and thus transform themselves and conditions of their lives" (p. 272). As a result of this participation, teachers can begin to change their practices and beliefs about diverse groups of students and their parents.

Because "African American and Latino boys are among the last in line academically, lead most dropout statistics, and are over-represented in the youth (and adult) penal population" (Haycock, 2002, p. 7), it is critical that conversations focus on how we can change this current reality. In order for our classrooms to be places of learning, caring, and inquiry for all students, the school must be a place where teachers are also involved in communities of learning, caring, and inquiry. Teachers must become reflective practitioners with one another and not work in isolation. They must collaborate on many practical levels, including instructional planning and classroom management and engagement. More importantly, they must collaboratively engage in their own learning, describing, and discovering of effective learning environments and learning opportunities for all students, particularly those for whom equitable achievement seems elusive. Teachers need to determine and practice the implementation of instruction that ensures all students feel connected and engaged. When teachers feel they have a voice in decisions about issues related to teaching and learning, they will become more empowered and reflective about their practice.

According to DuFour and colleagues (2006), the foundation of Professional Learning Communities requires that teachers discuss and seek answers to the following questions: Exactly what is it we want all students to learn? How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills? What happens in our school when a student does not learn? If we do this we will be empowered to work collectively to not only provide quality instruction but we will improve student learning and achievement for all our students—to bring about true social justice and equity within our schools.

Raising Critical Consciousness about Practices, Beliefs, and Expectations

It was clear in this study that teachers were unaware of their language in referring to students as "other." It follows that they are not likely to be aware of their beliefs and biases in their references to "those kids." An interruption of these beliefs is predicated upon long-term, focused conversations. Schools can become the place where the knowledge and experiences of all individuals are taught and cherished. We will need to keep race, racism, and equity on the top and within the center of all our agendas. Although still a sensitive topic, we must not shy away from the discussion and explore how race and racism continue to impact educational policy and the practice between a teacher and her students.

"Teachers should regard students as capable and participatory beings, rich in both individual and social potential. The realization of that vision of the student is what finally should drive school reform in the United States" (Rose, et al., 2001, p. 7).

Schools can make a difference—outside of school experiences—and family background has often been argued and continues to be argued in the face of research that contradicts that these are the sole indicators of student achievement. Haycock (2002) and others have found that the greatest variable in determining student success was teacher experience and quality. An effective teacher is effective with students regardless of their ethnicity and socioeconomic status. In fact, teacher impact is strongest on those students who have lower academic performance.

Teachers are the key to the development of more inclusive forms of education. Their beliefs, attitudes, and actions are what create the contexts in which children and young people are required to learn. This being the case, the task must be to develop education systems within which teachers feel supported as well as challenged in relation to their responsibility to keep exploring more effective ways of facilitating the learning of all students. School communities can become responsive to all students and their cultures by implementing inquiry practices within the teaching staff. The infusion of culturally responsive inquiry strategies into the school's culture offers powerful opportunities to build capacity in schools to alter low student-achievement scenarios. These practices promise to create significantly more positive outcomes for students, especially in schools where low-income students and many students of color have historically been underachievers.

Questions for Further Research

Although research has stated that teacher effectiveness matters, the characteristics of effectiveness are inconclusive. Studies have explored instructional

practices and teacher efficacy—teachers' beliefs about their own teaching ability and

practice—but often have not looked at teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities

and capabilities. The question remains: What constitutes an "effective" teacher? What

do teachers do in the classroom and what they believe about their teaching and their

students that make them effective in terms of student achievement?

Stronge (2007) framed six qualities and behaviors of an effective teacher: a

teacher's educational background and preparation for teaching, a teacher's interaction

with his/her students, classroom management, instructional planning, instructional

preparation, and implementation and the monitoring of student progress. Other

researchers have included qualities of the teacher as reflective practitioner teacher

expertise to engage students (Bai & Ertmer, 2008), and the quality of the learning

environment. In comparison to numerous articles and studies that have quantified

student achievement, very few studies have qualitatively examined the effect of

teachers' beliefs and biases on their individual students' academic ability.

Schools were initially designed to help educate individuals to be active and

involved members of their community—democratic ideal. This was the critical role of

schooling in the evolution of culture; unfortunately, schools were originally set up for

White middle-to-upper class males in the 19th century. As a result, schools actually

created a resistance for an egalitarian culture and created instead the continuation of

the status quo, but schools still have the great potential of being sites of transformation

for communities, culture, and the entire United States. Although schools have been

places where lower socioeconomic and minority students have been "subjected to

practices and attitudes that can reinforce their second class status, they are also places where resistance to such hegemony can be collectively harnessed and made transformative" (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 452).

Very few changes have occurred within the public school system; the social structure of schools has remained relatively the same. As a result, the education system has created a culture that favors Eurocentrism. The broader issue of power and social structure belies the fact that the system is unfairly balanced for middle-class Caucasian American youth. We have not created a system that can redress minority student underachievement. NCLB legislation was an attempt. Thinking that changing accountability would change the system itself was a false assumption and one that has not yet closed the achievement gap. In fact, by virtue of the way schools continue to be structured, it seems to be the unwritten goal of schooling to maintain social class relations and the locus of power in our society. School organization and culture needs to be addressed and significantly changed in order to alter the set of norms and conventions that currently operate in our school environments. In the analysis of class, race, and schooling, Bordieu (1986) states that some kinds of cultural capital leverage more success in schools (middle- and upper-class culture) than other kinds (lower class), which tend to lead to failure in school and creation of working-class status. Accordingly, school failure is created by the larger culture and society, as well as the educational system itself, which was created out of this larger culture and society. Thus, school failure can be attributed, in large part, to the result of an oppressive society.

American education was begun steeped in and has perpetuated White middle-class values. What plays out in society, plays out in our schools.

> The sacrifice necessary for real social change to take place is sometimes too painful or inconceivable; it may be difficult for those in our country to take serious strides toward racial, social, and economic justice because it means that, in some cases, some group has to give up something of interest to it, such as its privileges and its ways of life. (Milner, 2007)

Change then is often seen as a threat to a particular group's way of life – and this group within the United States is Caucasian.

Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1966) study, as well as subsequent research, has confirmed that teachers' expectations matter, that teachers can consciously or unconsciously reinforce class, gender, and race inequities. This occurs when some students are encouraged to be successful while other are discouraged; this often ends up reproducing what is seen in the larger society—the social cycle of advantages and disadvantages. The reverse could also be true—that teachers' expectations can lead to improved academic achievement for all their students, and especially those who have in the past been expected to achieve the least.

The outcome of practicing this culturally responsive teaching will be a pedagogy that is transformative (Gay, 2000) and liberating (Shujaa, 1994). Of great significance in the current results-oriented climate, culturally responsive teaching and learning produces academic success as well (Foster, 1997; Gay, 2000, Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2005). The challenge is for culturally responsive teaching to be happening systematically throughout schools and school systems, rather than being

episodic. The research on cultural responsiveness informs us that it should be central to the conversations on school improvement and not an afterthought. Any discussion of whole-school inquiry as a transformation strategy should be situated within the current discourse on culturally responsive and appropriate pedagogy.

Final Thoughts: Our Schools—Places of Transformation

For too long we have had historically large numbers of disenfranchised students, students who feel they have no voice or place within the curriculum or systems of our schools. Our children's voices have been silenced and even denigrated. Our schools have not provided the democratic environment or education that has been promised since the inception of public education in the United States. The academic achievement of our children has been less about their skills and abilities then about the "white territorial practices of teachers and others at a school (which) create alienation, resistance" (Allen, 1999, p. 5). But this does not need to continue; in fact, it must stop if we are to truly create the democracy that we so fervently believe in and attest to.

We can no longer view race as peripheral, it is paramount in changing our practice and schools to being places of transformation and empowerment for all our children. We can begin to do this by being willing to ask ourselves every day within our classrooms, "Am I treating any students differently from others and why? Do I have the same expectations for all my students? Do I believe that all my students can be academically successful?" A teacher's belief system creates the organizing framework for their classroom and instruction (Friere, 2007; Kim Hyunsook Song,

2006) believed that all education is political; thus, our schools are not neutral

institutions but instead reflections of the larger cultural and societal setting.

We either function to maintain the larger society or to transform it. A greater moral

responsibility propels us to transform public education so that all students benefit. In

the work of transforming education we must face what may be difficult and even

uncomfortable—ourselves. For it is each of us, the ones working within the

educational system, who keep the system going as it is and it is each of us then who

must make the changes that are needed for our children. This will not be an easy or

even comfortable task. "As we work together to restore hope to the future, we need to

include a new and strange ally——our willingness to be disturbed" (Wheatley, 2002,

p. 34).

Limitations of Study

One limitation of the study was the researcher's positionality. The researcher is

very aware that she is the 'other' not just for the students on her campus but for her

teachers as well. She is aware of her class and ethnic privilege as a White woman and

she is also aware that her teachers may also consider her an outsider because she is

"the administration." Especially in a district fraught with a history of distrust between

the central office and the teachers' union, administrators are often seen as not

trustworthy or no longer able to understand the position of a teacher. That is why it

was also extremely important for this researcher to not be involved in the discussions

and to have the discussions tape recorded and then transcribed in order to avoid some of what could manifest itself due to her positionality.

Some of the data could have been influenced due to teachers' reluctance to be honest or open with someone new and in a position of perceived and real authority, even though I did not attend the meetings. Another limitation is that because teachers volunteered to be part of the study, some teachers' views may not be conveyed or included in the results. Not all results may be generalizable.

Implications of Study

The ingrained institutional behaviors in our educational system have impacted and perhaps even determined the words we use to describe students which have influenced teachers' perceptions and expectations of students. This use of language has been allowed to persist and has created a cultural pedagogy of low achievement which in turn will persist until this changes. This study further substantiates this view as well as building an argument for the critical need for professional development and professional learning community conversations surrounding race.

Culturally responsive teachers are not only aware of the effects of teacher perception and expectations on student achievement but are aware of the power of language and the barriers to this awareness and to critical conversations about race which must be overcome. The educational system was created in the belief in its power to educate a citizenry; it must also be the place of transformation for not just an educated populace but one that believes in social justice and equity for all.

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