

**Critical Mentoring in Urban Contexts: Culturally Embracing School-Community
Collaborative Partnerships**

by

Kenneth Donaldson

B.S., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997

M.S., California State University, Long Beach, 2008

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This dissertation was presented

by

Kenneth Donaldson

It was defended on

August 1, 2019

and approved by

Dissertation Director: Dr. Jill Perry, PhD, Research Associate Professor, Administrative and
Policy Studies,

Committee Member: Dr. Lori Delale-O'Connor, PhD, Assistant Professor, Center for Urban
Education

Committee Member: Dr. Tyrone Howard, PhD, Professor and Associate Dean for Equity
Diversity and Inclusion, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of
California, Los Angeles

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Kenneth Donaldson, EdD

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Mentoring programs regularly discuss the positive academic, developmental, and socioemotional outcomes for young people who are being supported. Research around school-based mentoring shows that it has the potential to increase mentees' self-perception, interest in academic pursuit, motivation to learn, and academic performance, prosocial attachments and trust, as well as their interpersonal skills and their ability to deal with social and emotional difficulties. However, much less attention is paid to preparing mentors who can support students, particularly marginalized and minoritized students of color, in an asset-based, equity-framed manner. This research study evaluates 15 school-based mentors (the Heinz Fellows) who work for the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh, supporting students in Pittsburgh Public Schools in the Hill District. Using the Opportunity Gap Framework developed by Milner (2010, 2012) to structure the program, train and develop the mentors, and evaluate findings, pre-and post-survey results showed that the Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions as a group increased in alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework. These perceived mindset shifts occurred due to five major activities in the program: (1) critical race reflection, (2) context observations of cultural discontinuity, (3) critical institutionalism, (4) critical mentoring practices, and (5) exposure to research and lectures around equity and culturally relevant practices.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Problem Area

School-based mentoring (SBM) programs can serve as a valuable resource for both students and teachers, particularly in urban contexts. School-based mentoring of youth is broadly defined as an individualized, supportive relationship between a young person and a non-parental adult that promotes positive development (DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Keller & Pryce, 2010; Lakind, Atkins, & Eddy, 2015; Mboka, 2017). In addition to supporting students and teachers through academic pathways, mentors can provide socio-emotional support for those students who may not receive these types of supports from their teachers, particularly marginalized and minoritized students (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Among the four key criteria that typically define school-based mentoring are: (1) the program operates on a school campus; (2) mentoring relationships meet for the duration of the school year; (3) youth are referred by teachers, counselors, and other school staff; and (4) SBM is not just a tutoring program, nor is it as unstructured as community-based mentoring (Garringer, 2008).

Much of the research that has been done around school-based mentoring involves mentoring outcomes, particularly for programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and similar mentoring programs (DuBois, Herrera, & Rivera, 2018). In particular, youth mentoring interventions have been found to enhance mentees' self-perception, interest in academic pursuit, motivation to learn, and academic performance (Linnehan, 2001), prosocial attachments and trust (Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007), as well as their interpersonal skills and their ability to deal with social and emotional difficulties (Blinn-Pike, Kuschel, McDaniel, Mingus, & Mutti, 1998).

Research has shown that a school-based mentoring model has the advantages of engaging those mentors and students who might not be involved in mentoring otherwise and operating at a fairly low cost, the issues are that SBM may have little impact on out-of-school-time issues and these programs may not produce relationships with the same closeness as community-based programs (Garringer, 2008). Though these outcomes for mentees are important, what receives less attention are the ways in which supportive adult mentors are trained and developed in order to foster relationships with youth in urban contexts and how these outcomes are measured.

Therefore, the question becomes: how do we develop qualified mentors who are capable of supporting students in urban contexts and evaluate their growth in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions? Research shows that teachers are not being effectively prepared to support students of color in many teacher education programs, which leaves many teachers in urban schools underprepared to meet the academic and cultural challenges that they may face working in urban contexts (Ford, Glimps, & Giallourakis, 2007). Regarding formal mentor training, initial and ongoing training of school-based mentors has been associated with subsequent mentoring relationship closeness and mentees' perceptions about the quality of mentor-mentee relationship, including support, satisfaction, and effectiveness of the mentor (Herrera, Dubois, & Grossman, 2013; Herrera, Grossman, Kaugh, Feldman, McMaken, & Jucovy, 2007; Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000). Therefore, in the instances where teachers may not have the capacity to support students in urban contexts, school-based mentors can serve a valuable role in supporting students by helping to build relationships that help create a more welcoming environment for students in urban classrooms. In order to effectively develop school-based mentors who support students in urban contexts, the challenge lies in providing experiences for these mentors that

provide them with opportunities to support students holistically in ways that teachers may not be properly equipped to provide in school-based settings.

While mentors can help to support students both academically and socio-emotionally, it is important to be thoughtful and intentional in developing a program that prepares mentors to support students in urban contexts. Though much research has focused on the positive effects of school-based mentoring for students, particularly around key developmental outcomes such as grades and attendance (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011), there has been less discussion around the preparation of mentors to be able to effectively enact their roles in culturally relevant ways. Most research points to the need for mentor training to provide both the information mentors need to acquire and skills they should develop in their training programs (Garringer, 2008). School-based mentor (SBM) training programs are often not deliberately designed to produce effective mentors who can understand the contexts of the students they are supporting and who can provide for long-lasting mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2007). Consequently, it is important to consider the ways in which mentors are both developed and evaluated in SBM programs, particularly for those working with students in urban contexts.

Research shows that many SBM programs face challenges for a variety of reasons including lack of mentor commitment, minimal emotional support for mentors, and – perhaps most importantly – insufficient mentor training (Dubois, Doolittle, Yates, Silverthorn, & Tebes, 2006; Karcher, 2005; Karcher & Herrera, 2008; Kilburg, 2007; Rhodes & Dubois, 2008; Spencer, 2007). These reasons suggest that both the training structure of an SBM program along with the ongoing support provided to mentors during the program are crucial to the success of the program (Miller, 2007). A particularly strong framework for mentoring preparation involves evidence-informed training, which combines findings from the research literature, input from practitioners, and

feedback from trainees to create practices that are well-grounded in the literature and reflect the best practices of the field (MENTOR, 2015a, 2015b). To accompany and support this framework, a detailed, research-grounded method of evaluation of mentors is also important to be able to effectively determine the perception from mentors regarding changes in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions that they may undergo from participating in a school-based mentor training program.

In addition to building an effective school-based mentoring training and development program, it is also essential to incorporate continual monitoring and supporting of mentees within these programs (MENTOR, 2015a, 2015b). Ongoing relationship development with mentees can assist with overcoming challenges as well as allow for reflection upon situations and problem solving with other mentors and mentees. Building time for regular meeting intervals and check-ins between mentors and mentees is also recommended as a best practice (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). Finally, evaluation of mentor/mentee interactions should ensure the upholding of ethical responsibilities to do good and avoid harm (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005). Overall, providing a strong support system for mentors is crucial not only to maintain mentor satisfaction, but to ensure best outcomes for student mentees.

Milner's (2010) Opportunity Gap Framework offers one framework with which to develop and evaluate a school-based mentor program situated in the urban context. Milner (2010, 2012) argues that by teaching educators – and in this instance mentors – to approach students in urban contexts with an opportunity gap versus achievement gap mindset, these educators will develop the following five main competencies:

- 1) the ability to reject the notion of color blindness;
- 2) the ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend cultural conflicts;

- 3) the ability to understand how meritocracy operates;
- 4) the ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mindsets; and
- 5) the ability to reject context-neutral mindsets and practices.

These five competencies provide a foundation for developing an asset-based, equity-focused mindset in mentors working in urban contexts. An asset-based, equity-framed approach is one in which students, their families, and their communities are valued for their positive attributes and abilities, and where mentors build upon these strengths while recognizing the institutional and systemic challenges that create barriers for these students (Milner, 2010, 2012). Through enactment of a mentor curriculum – including professional development opportunities and educational experiences – that incorporates an opportunity gap approach, the goal is for mentors to develop critical consciousness Freire (1970). Freire defined “critical consciousness” as the development of consciousness-raising within educators in order to reflect and begin to ask critical questions of their practice and of the institutional and systemic inequities within the educational system and society as a whole. In turn, school-based mentors operating under this framework will develop the capacity to enact social justice education, with the understanding that socially just educator training aims to prepare professionals to educate and support students in culturally responsive ways and also acts as critical change agents in schools and society (Whipp, 2013).

This inquiry will evaluate the ability of a school-based mentoring program to shift attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of mentors using Milner’s Opportunity Gap Framework in the development, training, ongoing support, and evaluation of the program – in this case, the Heinz Fellows Program. The goal of this inquiry is to conduct an evaluation through the use of surveys, reflection journal document review, and semi-structured interview data to determine if incorporating an Opportunity Gap Framework in the development, training, ongoing support, and

evaluation contributes to a shift in the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of the Fellows to be more asset-based and equity-minded in supporting students in urban contexts in ways that are aligned with the Opportunity Gap Framework and its tenets. The following sections will provide the background of the inquiry context and setting of this evaluation along with the outlining the stakeholders involved in this inquiry, the problem of practice, and guiding inquiry questions.

1.2 Inquiry Context and Setting

The Heinz Fellows Program is a collaboration between The Heinz Endowments, the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Pittsburgh, and the Pittsburgh Public School District (PPS). The Heinz Endowments is a Pittsburgh-based philanthropic organization that “seeks to help [the] region thrive as a whole and just community, and through that work to model solutions to major national and global challenges” (The Heinz Endowments, n.d.). Specifically, The Heinz Endowments concentrates on “advancing a sustainable future for our community and planet, successful learning outcomes for young people and their families, and a culture of engaged creativity for all our citizens” (The Heinz Endowments, n.d.). The Center for Urban Education is housed within the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh with the vision to be a space of learning and sharing with urban communities to positively transform educational opportunities and experiences. CUE structures its research, service, and knowledge dissemination into three areas: community partnership and engagement, educator development and practice, and student academic and social development. Pittsburgh Public Schools is the school district that is supported by the Heinz Fellows program and where the Fellows do their work. The mission of

PPS is to graduate high school students who are college-, career- and life-ready, meaning they are prepared to complete a two- or four-year college degree or workforce certification. The vision for PPS is to be one of America's premier school districts, student-focused, well managed, and innovative. PPS also strives to hold itself accountable for preparing all children to achieve academic excellence and strength of character so that they have the opportunity to succeed in all aspects of life. Together, these three entities – The Heinz Foundation, the Center for Urban Education, and Pittsburgh Public Schools – collaboratively established the guidelines for the Heinz Fellows Program, specifically around determining which schools would be involved in the program. The agreement was made that the schools supported by the program would be those located in the Hill District community within the city of Pittsburgh: A. Leo Weil Elementary (“Weil”), Miller African-Centered Academy (“Miller”), and University Preparatory at Margaret Milliones 6-12 (“UPrep”). The University of Pittsburgh, and more specifically the School of Education and the Center for Urban Education, has had a long and sometimes difficult history with the schools in the Hill District, particularly with UPrep. Though the relationship has been tenuous at times (Young, 2011), the Center for Urban Education has been committed to supporting UPrep and the other Hill District schools through the Heinz Fellows Program as well as Ready to Learn, an after-school tutoring program.

The current Heinz Fellows program is a reconfiguration of a similarly named two-year initiative that was originally created in 2011 as a Black male teaching pipeline program in Pittsburgh. The Heinz Fellows program was originally designed to support and encourage more Black men to become teachers and to provide role models and mentors for Black male youth in Pittsburgh city schools. During the first four years of that original initiative, almost 20 Black men completed the program, where the participants were compensated for their work with a stipend

and tuition remission for a graduate degree program. However, due to a variety of factors including the lack of Black men who actually went into teaching following the program, the program was temporarily stopped and relocated to its current location at the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh. The current restructured program, around which this evaluation is focused, has a different purpose than the original initiative. The program is now designed as a one-year school-based mentoring program that seeks to produce a diverse pipeline of educators and advocates who can build positive relationships with students and effectively support PPS teachers, staff, and administration. The Fellows undergo an eight-week orientation and training period during the summer prior to the start of the school year. Once the school year begins, the Fellows are directly embedded in the classroom, spending three to four days a week with a teacher, their mentees, and other students. They must also conduct a participatory action research project at their school site. Similar to the original program, Fellows also earn a stipend.

The Heinz Fellows Program is aimed at creating pathways leading to three primary vocational options for Fellows: eventual entry into the teaching profession, education advocacy work with a nonprofit organization, or grassroots community organizing. One of the primary goals of the program is that the Fellows leave the program approaching their ongoing work – hopefully related to the field of education – with an asset-based, equity-focused mindset from serving as school-based mentors directly supporting classrooms, while participating in critical discussions around educational systems, and school policies. This evaluation will look specifically at the experiences of the Fellows as school-based mentors in the program and the ability of the program to facilitate the Fellows in developing attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards understanding and aligning with an Opportunity Gap Framework for supporting students in urban contexts. The Heinz Fellows Program in its current iteration is now open to those of all genders,

gender identities, sexual orientations, racial identities, and ethnicities. Though the goal is not for Fellows to necessarily become classroom teachers at the conclusion of the program as it had been in the past, the aim is for the Fellows to be engaged with urban schools and to be advocating for equitable education in a variety of ways after the program ends, whether through teaching or working for organizations involved in educational advocacy, policy, or other avenues. To that end, selecting a diverse pool of candidates for the Heinz Fellows Program in the hope of diversifying the workforce in Pittsburgh Public Schools and other educational organizations within Pittsburgh is another intended outcome of the program. One of the primary requirements for selection into the Heinz Fellows Program is that the applicant must be a college graduate; however applicants do not need to have graduated with a degree in education or have any experience working in the field of education in order to be considered for the program.

The Heinz Fellows Program is housed at CUE, where I currently serve as the Associate Director of Strategic Initiatives and Executive Manager of the Heinz Fellows Program. In this role, I develop the training, professional development, educational experiences, and curriculum that offers the Fellows learning opportunities to build knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities necessary to work effectively in urban contexts. One of the main aims of the program content is to build the Fellows' capacity to academically and socioemotionally support and mentor students in urban schools using an asset-based, equity-focused perspective. The training begins with a focus on identity, and the content of the training in the program is centered around professional development and educational experiences around five major competencies:

- 1) Understanding the urban context;
- 2) Tutoring and teaching;
- 3) Mentoring and social support;

- 4) Participatory action research; and
- 5) Arts and technology.

The curriculum for the program also incorporates aspects of social justice teacher education, particularly discussion around culturally relevant pedagogy and practices. This is important because as school-based mentors, though the Fellows are not responsible for teaching or curriculum within their classrooms, it is important to have knowledge of research and best practices around how to properly support students in urban contexts in culturally relevant ways. (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2009). The Fellows practice and build upon these competencies in PPS classrooms (their “field settings”) several days a week, where they also provide academic and socio-emotional support to students in one-on-one and small group settings. In addition to working in the classroom supporting students and teachers, the Fellows participate in weekly collaborative critical inquiry sessions in the Center for Urban Education, complete and submit periodic reflection journals, and participate in regular community engagement experiences in the Hill District and surrounding Pittsburgh communities throughout the program. The combination of these activities is structured to contribute to the development of critical consciousness for the Fellows as they build relationships with their students and learn to not only to advocate on behalf of their students, but also to support their students in advocating for themselves. Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009) define critical consciousness as the process in which educators “achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them” (p. 14), which describes the desired goal and outcome of operating a school-based mentoring program from an Opportunity Gap Framework model. Through their field experiences and support of students in the classrooms, Fellows also work to build the capacity to assist in carrying out social justice education in their school settings. Katsarou, Picower, and Stovall (2010)

define social justice education as “the day-to-day processes and actions utilized in classrooms and communities centered in critical analysis, action, and reflection (praxis) amongst all educational stakeholders (students, families, teachers, administrators, community organizations, and community members) with the goal of creating tangible change in their communities, cities, states, nation, and the larger world” (p. 139). Therefore, a desired outcome of the program is building the capacity of the Fellows to carry out social justice education concepts.

1.3 Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders in this inquiry are the participants in year-long cohort of the Heinz Fellows Program. Specifically, those involved in this inquiry included the first cohort that participated in the program since the program was relocated to the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Fellows were recruited nationally with the goal of creating a cohort that reflects the racial demography of the Pittsburgh Public School population, which is approximately 53% Black/African American, while considering the Hill District student population, which is over 90% Black/African American. Fellows applied to the program by submitting a resume, transcript, essay, and letters of recommendation electronically via an online portal. Those who submitted all of the materials to be considered for the program were then sorted by a rubric that was based on scoring of the resumes, transcripts, and essays. Finally, selected individuals were invited for interviews via Skype, and a final cohort of 15 Fellows was selected. In total for this cohort, out of 55 total applicants, 22 applicants were selected for Skype interviews and 15 diverse college graduates were selected for the first cohort of the program, who are the focus of this evaluation.

The demographics for the Fellows and the number of students supported at each school site are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographics of Heinz Fellows and Supported Student Populations

| Site Name | No. of Students Mentored | No. of Heinz Fellows | Heinz Fellows Demographics | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| | | | <i>Gender</i> | | | <i>Race/Ethnicity</i> | |
| | | | Male | Female | Queer | AA | White |
| Miller | 31 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| UPrep | 103 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Weil | 29 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 3 |

The Fellows are the primary stakeholders of this evaluation because they are the school-based mentors who are being evaluated, and the evaluation directly examines their attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards working with students in urban contexts through an Opportunity Gap Framework. Specifically, it is their experience in the program that is being directly evaluated, as opposed to student mentee outcomes. The Fellows also completed Opportunity Gap surveys (Appendix A) at the beginning and at the conclusion of the program as well as reflection journals throughout the duration of the program, and took part in semi-structured interviews at the conclusion of the program, which all factor into the evaluation of the Heinz Fellows Program.

Secondary stakeholders for this evaluation are students, teachers, and administrators at the three school sites that the Fellows supported. Although this evaluation only examines outcomes for the Fellows, the interaction of the Fellows with students, administrators, and teachers can also have a tremendous impact on the perception of the Fellows regarding their attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions in supporting students in urban contexts. However, information

regarding the secondary stakeholders was only obtained through observations from the Fellows as opposed to obtaining information directly from students, teachers, or administrators. Though the impression of these secondary stakeholders is important to consider for a comprehensive evaluation of the program, this inquiry focus solely on the Fellows’ perception of the program.

It is important to understand the demographics at each location where the Fellows worked.

Table 2 displays demographic information for each of the three schools.

Table 2 Student Gender and Ethnicity Demographics of Miller African-Centered Academy, A. Leo Weil Elementary, and University Preparatory at Margaret Milliones

| Site | Student Demographics (Percentages) | | | | | | |
|--------|------------------------------------|--------|----------------|-------|------|-------|---------|
| | Gender | | Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| | Male | Female | AA | White | Hisp | Multi | Pac Isl |
| Miller | 55 | 45 | 92 | 3 | - | 4 | 1 |
| Weil | 53 | 47 | 90 | 5 | 2 | 3 | - |
| UPrep | 51 | 49 | 97 | 2 | - | 1 | - |

In addition, all three schools that were supported by the school-based mentors are defined by the Pittsburgh Public School District as “academically underperforming”. These three schools were chosen to participate in the Heinz Fellows Program based on their demographics, achievement scores, and location, namely in the same neighborhood of Pittsburgh (the Hill District). Teachers and administrators were also supported by the work of the Fellows through the Fellows’ efforts to remediate issues, provide support academically with students by working with them in small groups, and serve as advocates for students when challenges arise.

1.4 Problem of Practice

Many educators and mentors carry deficit-framed narratives of students in urban schools, which shape how they view, interact with, and support their students and mentees. “Deficit thinking” is defined as attributing individual blame to youth who do not perform well in schools as something that these youth are missing as opposed to focusing on or addressing the oppressive systems that create these conditions (Valencia, 2010). These deficit-minded educators and mentors often take an approach towards their students that focuses on what students, their families, and urban communities “lack” rather than the assets that they possess. Such a deficit mindset often leads mentors in urban schools to develop misconceptions regarding how their students learn, engage, and communicate and what support they may need. In fact, this deficit framing may often cause mentors in urban contexts to make incorrect assumptions about their students’ perceived lack of intelligence, perceived lack of family regard towards education, and perceived lack of community support for schools. School-based mentor development programs need to develop a framework and curriculum that combats the reinforcement of this deficit mindset in school-based mentors. In order to properly support students in urban contexts, mentors who have developed an asset-framed, equity-focused approach to working with students can serve as a valuable resource in these classrooms.

An overarching issue and challenge for mentors working in urban contexts is the need for building relationships with and a better understanding of their students and the contexts in which these students live. Often implicit (and sometimes explicit) bias, prejudice, and racism, and classism govern how mentors interact with and treat their students, families, and communities situated in urban contexts. These attitudes are typically rooted in the mentors’ failure to recognize student assets or to understand of the challenges faced by many students and families in urban

communities (Gay, 2002). Though racial differences may play a role in how teachers interact with and relate to their students (Bristol, 2014), students may also differ from their teachers and mentors in a broad range of other cultural indicators such as socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion (Emdin, 2016). These physical, social, economic, and cultural differences may widen this misunderstanding and cause mentors to view these differences from a deficit perspective where they judge mentees with a “less than” mentality, similar to the way that some teachers may teach them less rigorously because they assume they cannot achieve as well as white students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). Rather than building upon student differences and using diversity as a learning tool, many mentors use white, Christian, heteronormative measures to support and work with their mentees. Therefore, having a diverse group of school-based mentors who carry an asset-based, equity-framed mindset who can support teachers and students in such a capacity can have a tremendously positive impact.

Foundationally, schools must be rooted in liberation for children (Love, 2019). Therefore, in order to approach working with students in urban contexts in a liberatory manner, it is essential to have school-based mentors who have been trained and developed not only in equity and social justice, but also in the recognition of assets in urban communities and the acknowledgment and understanding of opportunity gaps which impact students in urban contexts. The primary outcome measure for this evaluation of school-based mentors in asset-based, equity-framed development programs is determining how the attitudes, thoughts, and dispositions of these mentors have shifted, both through the professional development opportunities and educational experiences of the Heinz Fellows Program along with actually working in the classrooms directly with students and supporting teachers in urban contexts. The training, professional development, and educational experiences for mentors in these school-based programs must be approached in a way that builds

upon the assets that students bring to the classroom and the strengths within these students' families and communities. Since many educators and mentors possess deficit mindsets rooted in racism and classism, the development of critical consciousness for these mentors is important for properly supporting students in urban contexts. However, the disruption of inequitable practices and policies and actual enactment of advocating and advancing liberatory practices and policies for students are the key reasons for incorporating aspects of social justice teacher education. As Zeichner (2016) points out, it is especially important that these programs rooted in social justice “disrupt the power-knowledge hierarchies that have marginalized the voices and expertise of teachers and local community members in preparing teachers” (p. 154). Therefore, an effective school-based mentor development program should support these mentors in developing the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions to support students, teachers, families, and communities in urban contexts in an asset-based, equity-focused manner.

This evaluation examined the Heinz Fellows Program, a restructured school-based mentoring program that was developed to bring non-traditional school-based mentors into urban classrooms to support students and teachers from an asset-based, equity-focused perspective. This program was developed based on feedback from research including qualitative student interviews, which showed that teachers in urban classrooms often carry deficit mindsets towards their students, students' families, and communities that create inequitable policies and practices within these classrooms (Milner, 2010; Valencia, 2010). This deficit mindset exhibited by teachers in urban classrooms often leads to academic and socioemotional challenges for students. The Heinz Fellows Program is designed to develop asset-minded school-based mentors through an equity-focused training and development program that helps participants build critical consciousness by working directly with students and supporting teachers in the Pittsburgh urban, public school context. The

structure of the program, involving critical inquiry groups, reflection and praxis, community engagement and field experiences, is important in allowing mentors to not only understand the cultural backgrounds of their students, but also to support the development of equitable classrooms in which social justice education can be upheld and carried out.

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to evaluate this asset-based, equity-focused mentor development program supporting urban schools. Specifically, this study evaluated the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of the Heinz Fellows in supporting students in urban contexts using an Opportunity Gap Framework. The focus of this study was to evaluate how the Fellows' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions have shifted perceptions as a result of the orientation and training, professional development opportunities, educational experiences, and interactions with students, teachers, and staff as the Fellows proceeded through the program. In addition, the activities to which the Fellows attribute causing the shift were evaluated.

Mentoring programs often discuss the outcomes for mentees but rarely discuss the program outcomes that the training, development, and participation in the programs themselves have on the mentors. For mentors who want to be change agents in urban contexts, it is important for them to be developed and supported in an asset-based, equity-focused training program in order to disrupt the deficit practices and policies that occur in many of these urban classrooms. Through a program such as the Heinz Fellows Program, which incorporates social justice teacher education concepts and uses understanding of opportunity gaps as a framework, a key goal is the development of critical consciousness in mentors. In return, this development of critical consciousness in the mentors can promote positive and equitable academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students through the enactment of social justice education.

Due to the social and historical context in which many urban schools are situated, it is important to have school-based mentor development programs geared towards urban schools that are not rooted in the traditional content of mentor development programs. Opportunity gaps continue to exacerbate and perpetuate inequities in urban schools, affecting primarily students of color (Milner, 2006). Therefore, it is important to develop mentors who have the capacity to support students and create classrooms that incorporate bridging opportunity gaps and building on the assets within students, their families, and their communities through an equitable lens. The Heinz Fellows Program serves as a way for mentors in urban contexts to receive this asset-based, equity-focused training and to develop critical consciousness in order to work toward closing opportunity gaps and creating equitable outcomes for students in urban schools while enacting social justice education.

The findings of this evaluation could also be useful to other school-based mentor programs in order to determine the appropriate framework to use when developing and training mentors to work in urban settings. Though each urban community has its own unique context and history, the findings of this evaluation could inform future work in the development of school-based mentors and educators who want to work in urban contexts. Furthermore, though this work is specifically geared towards mentors working in urban contexts, my belief is that framing around assets, opportunity gaps, and equity should be a priority for all school-based mentor and educator development programs. Higher education teacher education programs could use the findings of this evaluation to consider for developing and restructuring teacher education programs, especially for those who want to teach in urban contexts. In addition, mentoring programs, school districts, and philanthropic organizations who fund mentoring initiatives could use the results of this

evaluation to determine how they are designing their school-based mentoring programs and measuring their outcome goals for mentors.

1.5 Inquiry Questions

My problem of practice involves the lack of a standard framework and curriculum for school-based mentoring programs that support students in urban contexts. Therefore, I will be evaluating a school-based mentoring program for its effectiveness in developing mentors' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions in alignment with an Opportunity Gap Framework towards supporting students in urban contexts as a result of participating in an asset-based, equity-focused social justice educator development program. My evaluation will assess the ability of a year-long, externally grant-funded program (the Heinz Fellows Program) within an institution of higher education (University of Pittsburgh) to effectively develop and produce asset-based, equity-focused mentors who can become change agents in urban schools in the Pittsburgh Public School District. The framing of the program around assets and opportunity gaps should assist in developing these educators' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards equity and justice. My inquiry questions are:

- 1) How have the Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards opportunity gaps changed throughout the program as a result of the professional development, educational experiences, and interactions with students in the program?
- 2) Which specific professional development opportunities, educational experiences, and interactions with students and teachers in the program have helped to shift the Fellows'

perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards understanding opportunity gaps in supporting students in urban contexts?

2.0 Review of Literature

In order to review the literature for this research, I chose to review research that: (1) discussed best practices that would be used to develop an asset-based, equity-focused school-based mentor development program supporting youth in the urban context; (2) discussed a theoretical framework that could be used to structure the program; and (3) discussed the main components, educational experiences, and outcomes that an asset-based, equity-framed mentor development program would entail. I researched peer reviewed journal articles using the ERIC+ and PittCAT+ databases with the keywords “urban education”, “equity focused”, “asset based”, “social justice”, “critical consciousness”, “opportunity gaps”, and “school-based mentoring”. Given the context of the Heinz Fellows Program, I chose to review articles that spoke specifically to urban education and school-based mentoring in the United States that included discussions about social justice, critical consciousness, and/or asset-based frameworks.

The Heinz Fellows, in their role, serve as educators along with being mentors in their classroom setting. Therefore, much of the literature that I reviewed revolved around social justice teacher education concepts that were rooted in understanding “context” over “content” in regard to working with students in urban contexts, and involved conversation around providing equitable education and/or addressing opportunity gaps over achievement gaps. The foundation of asset-based, equity-focused, school-based mentor development has its roots in social justice teacher education. Therefore, I chose to also look at the research regarding social justice education in order to gain a better understanding how social justice education began and how it has evolved and developed over time.

2.1 School-Based Mentoring

School-based mentoring has been shown to have positive results for students regarding academic performance (Diversi & Mecham, 2005), self-perceptions of academic abilities (Bernstein, Dun Rappaport, Olsho, Hunt, & Levin, 2009), and attitudes toward school (Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002; King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). However, many youth mentoring studies show that results are either limited, temporary, or mixed (Herrera et. al. 2007; Pryce & Keller, 2012; Spencer, 2007). The key for having a positive impact in the research appears to come from approaching the work from a strengths- or asset-based perspective (Pryce, 2012). Therefore, an effective school-based mentoring program should provide mentors with the opportunity to view the students and communities that they support in this asset-based manner.

Youth mentoring has the potential to reduce inequity when approached with a social justice lens (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017). As opposed to recreating inequalities and oppressive structures, effective mentor training and development should allow mentors to understand power, privilege, and oppression and how these structural and institutional systems directly affect the students they work with, along with the students' families and communities. This may allow them to not only understand the context and cultural background from which their students may come from, but also give them the capability to have discussions with their students about how these inequities impact students in urban contexts. Achinstein (2012) described ways that effective mentor training focused on mentors' own identity, knowledge, biases, and receptiveness to change, as well as an understanding of their mentees' social contexts, assets, and challenges, which can help mentors work towards developing critical consciousness. Hughes, Steinhorn, Davis, Beckrest, Boyd, and Cashen (2012) reported that college students who participated in service-learning

courses while also serving as mentors for low-income youth participated in class discussions around poverty and oppression and ongoing reflective focus groups. This process allowed them to incorporate aspects of social justice education and self-reflection, which not only developed critical consciousness in the mentors but also may have resulted in improved relationships with their mentees. These studies show how important understanding one's own identity through self-reflection is for mentors in developing critical consciousness. Therefore, incorporating these program elements is important for the development of an asset-based, equity-focused, school-based mentoring program.

Weiston-Serdan (2017) developed the concept of critical mentoring, using essential components of critical theories including Critical Race Theory as a direct response to Sanchez, Colon-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield & Berardi's (2014) call to better address issues of race and ethnicity in mentoring. Weiston-Serdan found that critical mentoring operates best at the nexus of praxis, which begins at programming for most mentoring and youth development programs. Using Ladson-Billings' work around culturally relevant practices and the idea of cultural competence, Weiston-Serdan (2017) states that:

Critical mentoring is built on the notion that mentors are critical actors within communities and that they build relationships with young people to collaborate and partner with them to challenge the status quo, responding openly and honestly about systemic issues, while having the wherewithal to support youth in confronting them (i.e., critical consciousness).
(p. 41)

In essence, school-based mentoring programs, especially those working with marginalized and minoritized youth in urban contexts, must develop mentors who can not only identify and understand systemic and institutional inequities but are also able to support students in identifying

and overcoming these challenges and obstacles. Therefore, critical mentoring should be viewed as the optimal approach towards developing mentors, specifically those supporting marginalized and minoritized youth in urban contexts. The essential framework for critical mentoring is centered around Critical Race Theory, as illustrated in Figure 1.

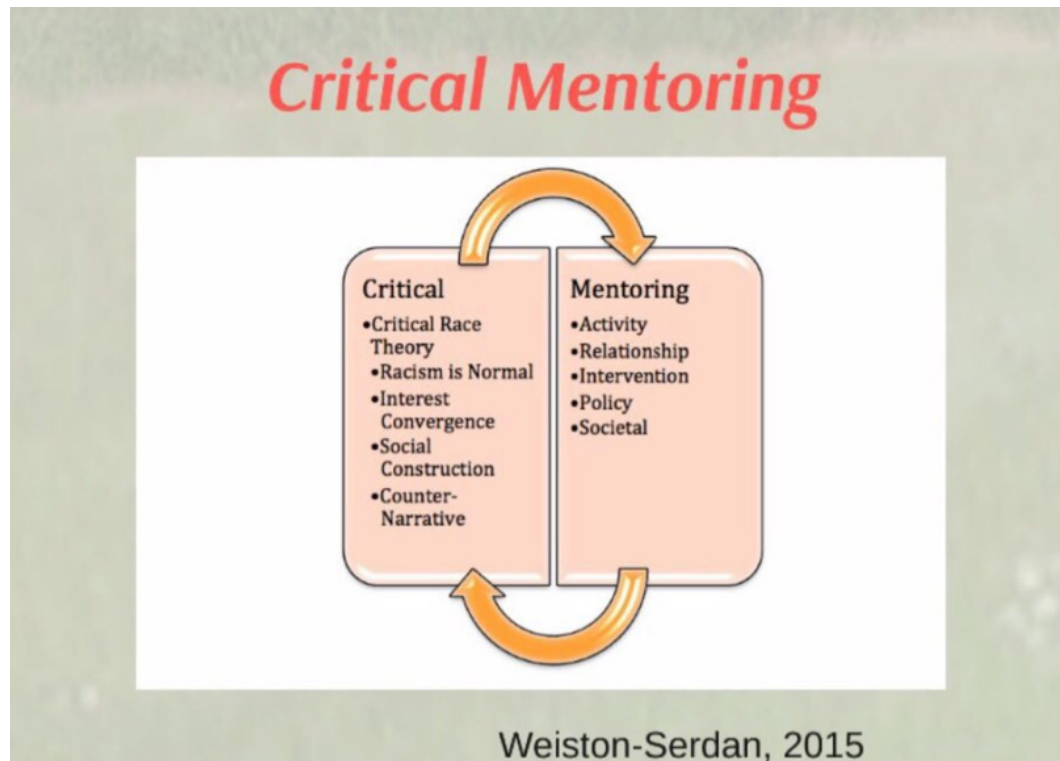


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework for Critical Mentoring (Weiston-Serdan, 2015)

In this figure, critical race theory and its tenets along with mentoring and its activities are intertwined in a cyclical relationship that produces critical mentoring. The theory behind the development of the concept of critical consciousness will be discussed next in this review of literature.

2.2 Critical Consciousness Theory

Critical consciousness allows for the recognition of privilege and oppression – both externally and internally – in systems and institutions. Critical Consciousness Theory focuses on the role of oppression and privilege in creating social and individual dysfunction (Freire, 1970). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) point to three major elements of critical consciousness theory:

- 1) fostering awareness of sociopolitical circumstances,
- 2) encouraging critical questioning, and
- 3) fostering collective identity.

When applied to education, this theory points out the oppression of individual students, particularly marginalized students (students of color, students in poverty, students with disabilities, etc.) as well as the oppressive nature of the school system and its policies in general. The development of critical consciousness is an extremely important concept to measure for educators in social justice educator development programs, especially for those working in urban contexts.

Katsarou, Picower, and Stovall (2010) discuss Freire's (1970) critical consciousness theory in their community and school building work with preservice and first-year teachers in partnerships between the Lance School and University of Illinois at Chicago and a dual certification program in New York City. Through their research, they found that social justice education using conscientization helps educators embrace justice, solidarity, and teaching as a political act (Katsarou et al, 2010). As a result of their work, they found that social justice educator training in teacher education programs connects the concerns of educators to the larger constructs of oppression in the form of racism, classism, gender subjugation, homophobia, ageism, and ableism (Katsarou et al., 2010). In this sense, social justice education looks at the larger systems and institutions behind inequity and injustice, advancing the work of multiculturalism. This should be

a key purpose of an asset-based, equity-focused mentor development program curriculum. Next, we will discuss the particular theoretical framework (Opportunity Gaps Framework) that frames this evaluation and provides the foundation for the Heinz Fellows Program.

2.3 Opportunity Gaps Framework

Milner's (2010, 2012) Opportunity Gaps Framework focuses on the disparities that exist between and among students in schools, particularly those in urban contexts. Though much attention has been paid to the discussion around achievement gaps, discussion around opportunity gaps focuses on the challenges and issues surrounding equitable education for students in urban contexts, as opposed to diagnosing what is "wrong" with students. Essentially, looking at opportunity as opposed to achievement shifts the focus away from individual blame and towards looking at systemic and institutionalized variables, which create inequitable educational opportunities. Due to the varying needs of marginalized students, particularly students of color in urban contexts, the social context in which they live and learn needs particular attention (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). Different ways of conceptualizing achievement and knowledge need to be addressed to understand how these opportunity gaps play a role in how educators work with marginalized students in urban contexts and how these students may engage with learning (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Milner, 2012). Unfortunately, traditional educator training programs typically focus discussion around achievement gaps with no focus on opportunity gaps, which causes educators to often portray individuals – particularly students of color in urban settings – as "lacking" something or being inherently less intelligent. However, it is important that educators realize the systemic and institutional barriers that create

these educational inequities and approach their work from an asset-based, equity-focused perspective in order to avoid conceptualizing students of color from a deficit perspective (Howard, 2010).

Focusing in particular on Ladson-Billings' (2006) concept of "education debt" and Jacqueline Irvine's (2010) idea of addressing structural gaps as well as looking at processes as opposed to outcomes can help shift educators into approaching their work with an asset-based, equity-focused mindset. As Milner (2012) states:

When we focus on achievement gaps, culturally diverse students can be positioned through conceptual deficits in the minds, practices, and designs of analysts such as researchers, theorists, and practitioners; consequently, consumers of these analyses may adopt deficit perceptions and transfer them into their practices with students. (p. 697)

In essence, educators may focus on achievement gaps and outcomes that dictate expected outcomes for students as opposed to being aware of the strengths and assets that their students possess (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2012). This "normalization" based on dominant identities often marginalizes and objectifies students of color, leading to deficit frameworks (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Sheurich & Young, 1997; Tillman, 2002). Five central themes help explain the opportunity gap framework: (a) conceptions of race ("colorblindness"), (b) conceptions of culture ("cultural conflicts"), (c) conceptions of economic status ("meritocracy"), (d) belief systems ("deficit mindsets/low expectations), and (e) social contexts (context-neutral mindsets").

2.3.1 Conceptions of Race

Educators may often avoid discussions around race both on an individual and systemic level because of fear, discomfort, and ignorance. However, research indicates that a "color-blind"

approach is more harmful to students of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Because race often dictates the experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of students, particularly students of color and students in urban contexts (Chapman, 2007; Howard, 2010; Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 2001, Milner, 2010), eliminating their race from their identity leaves students being viewed or understood incompletely rather than as complete or “whole” students. According to the research, it is critical for educators to acknowledge both their own and their students’ racial backgrounds in order to work effectively with urban students and as a means to develop their own critical consciousness (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Milner (2010) states that “In addressing opportunity gaps, educators consider individual realities as well as systemic and structural realities related to race and are challenged to think through how race shapes what happens both in society and in the classroom” (p. 14). By approaching educator development in this fashion, educators can approach their work in more culturally relevant ways that can close these opportunity gaps.

2.3.2 Conceptions of Culture

Cultural differences between educators and students can also create barriers to learning (Delpit, 1995; Emdin, 2016; Howard, 2001; Irvine, 2003). The disconnect between what students may experience culturally in their homes and communities and what is normalized in the classroom and school setting is often apparent. Educators need to be taught to be extremely mindful of how their own lived experiences shape curriculum, instruction, and other aspects of the school setting, such as classroom management and policies. Educators’ recognition and knowledge of these “cultural conflicts” can transform schools from being oppressive and “prison-like” into liberatory spaces. Recognizing and embracing cultural differences through discussion and co-created norms can assist in providing a more engaging classroom environment in urban classrooms.

2.3.3 Conceptions of Economic Status

Many educators point to disparities in students' socioeconomic status as explanations for so-called achievement gaps (Milner, 2006). The notion of achievement gap enforces educator beliefs that success – their own and their students – is based on merit or skill and ability. This mindset does not allow for recognition or acknowledgement of privilege as a factor of success (Kozol, 2005; Milner, 2010, 2012). Educators often fail to see that the U.S. educational system is not equal or equitable and that those from lower socioeconomic status start at a disadvantage (Ladson-Billings, 2006). These structural and systemic barriers reproduce racism, and the lack of recognition of these barriers leads to the idea of “meritocracy” in which educators believe that working hard is the only answer to doing well in school. Conversely, an opportunity gap approach to education takes these institutionalized and structural inequities into consideration when working with students, and encourages educators to make equitable accommodations to support the success of disadvantaged students.

2.3.4 Belief Systems

When working with students, particularly students of color in urban contexts, some educators do not believe their students are capable of doing well, and as a result hold low expectations for this population of students. In fact, these educators may believe that they are actually doing the students a favor by not challenging them (Milner, 2012). In addition, some educators who do recognize student assets may struggle to understand how to build on these or use them as anchors in the classroom (Milner, 2010). Therefore, it is important to not only hold students to high standards but to seek ways to use students' assets to deliver equitable teaching

practices. Without rigor and high expectations, the inability to engage in critical thinking can lead to disengagement from students (Gay, 2010). Therefore, taking an opportunity gap approach by holding high expectations, in conjunction with high accountability and an asset-based mindset, can have a positive effect on students' psychological, social, and emotional well-being (Milner, 2010). Understanding that students need to be challenged and will experience setbacks yet will hopefully learn from them is an important belief for asset-based, equity-focused educators to remember.

2.3.5 Social Contexts

Some educators do not recognize the history and impact that the location and social and cultural context of a school can have on the impact of its context for learning and achievement. Many educators believe that knowing the content of their work is more relevant and important than the social context of their workplace (Emdin, 2016; Milner, 2012). Understanding both the localized and broader social and cultural context of schooling and education, particularly in urban communities, is essential for educators. As Milner (2010) asserts:

Educators' understanding of how factors...influence students' opportunities is important as this awareness allows us to examine how a social context shapes opportunity rather than focusing primarily on the students themselves, on achievement gaps, or an outcome, such as test scores. (p. 38)

Understanding the social context of schools and communities gives educators the ability to look at teaching practices and determine if their practices and policies are appropriate for the students they are supporting. Understanding the roles of these five themes provides the ability to evaluate how attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and dispositions are being developed and shifted in

mentors. The next section of this review of literature will look at the foundation of social justice education and its development.

2.4 Foundation of Social Justice Education

Social justice education for teachers arose from the multiculturalism education movement following the 1960s and 1970s, spurred on by the civil rights and women's rights movements (Sleeter, 1996). Multicultural education was viewed as providing equitable educational opportunities for diverse groups of students (Banks & Banks, 2001). The original intent behind multicultural education was to contextualize inequalities and to heighten the power of families and marginalized communities, while working towards a more just world (Sleeter, 1996). This is an important distinction for educators and mentors who are supporting marginalized students and communities, specifically those in urban contexts.

The main tenets of multicultural education consist of culturally responsive and relevant teaching, cultural competence, and equity pedagogies (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, any curriculum involving educators working in urban contexts should include these concepts. King and Ladson-Billings (1990) describe attempts to help preservice teachers consider multicultural competence and critical perspectives as a continuum that begins with self-awareness and knowledge and extends to thinking critically about society. Similarly, Banks and Banks (2001) found that multicultural education should offer experiences that help educators:

- 1) uncover and identify their personal attitudes toward racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups;

- 2) acquire knowledge about the histories and cultures of the diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups within the nation and within their schools;
- 3) become acquainted with the diverse perspectives that exist within different ethnic and cultural communities; and
- 4) understand the ways in which institutionalized knowledge within schools, universities, and popular culture can perpetuate stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups.

These aspects are particularly important to consider when developing educators and mentors who work in urban contexts. Multicultural education began as a way to describe the working understanding of the systemic structural inequality in urban environments (Murrell, 2006). However, many viewed multicultural education as merely a supplement to the current curriculum. Finding that adding on to existing courses was not enough, a larger discourse around creating a field of social justice education emerged.

2.5 Social Justice Training for Educators and Pedagogical Frameworks

Incorporating culturally relevant pedagogical frameworks in the classroom was a key tenet of social justice training for educators, and several scholars have sought to define this tenet. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) established three criteria for developing cultural relevance to increase and improve engagement with urban schoolchildren: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Geneva Gay (2002) was also a critical voice in the discussion of culturally responsive teaching practices. She identified six key traits that were determined to be reliable attributes cultural responsiveness: validating, emancipatory, comprehensive, empowering, multidimensional, and transformative. More recently, pedagogical discussion for social justice

educator training has shifted towards a discourse around critical pedagogy. Jeff Duncan-Andrade's (2005) work with developing social justice educators focuses on student-empowering social justice pedagogy, which has roots in the liberatory pedagogy introduced by Paulo Freire (1970). Duncan-Andrade's five pillars revolve around: (1) critically conscious purpose, (2) duty, (3) preparation, (4) Socratic sensibility and (5) trust. Django Paris (2012), often credited with coining the term "culturally sustaining pedagogy", requires that educators "support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (p. 95). Christopher Emdin's (2016) recently introduced reality pedagogy, revolves around 5 Cs: co-generative dialogues, co-teaching, cosmopolitanism, context, and content. The constant variable in this literature was preparing the educator with the ability to recognize the institutionalized and systemic racism inherent in the current schooling system and supporting the educators in comprehending that students in urban schools bring assets and talents with them that may not normally be tapped into by traditional teaching methods.

Following a Freirean theory of social justice training for educators is not a new concept. Specifically, Westheimer and Kahne (2007) focus on the needed commitment to social justice in teacher education for it to be a liberating experience. However, determining actual practices that are involved in the development of educators that lead to the development of critical consciousness and these educators' application of social justice vary. Therefore, the question becomes: what are the actual practices that are involved in educator and mentor development that lead to the development of critical consciousness and the application of social justice practices?

Social justice has been frequently used as a conceptual framework in teacher education, particularly in urban education, with the indication and understanding that incorporating social justice into teaching provides liberatory opportunities for marginalized and minoritized students.

Therefore, based on the research, in order to be effective in enacting social justice, urban educator programs should provide the ability for novice educators to (1) consider the values and politics that permeate educational and social institutions; (2) think critically about how the current conditions in urban schools came to be and who benefits from them; and (3) pay explicit attention to inequalities associated with social categories such as race, language, social class, and gender (Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Quartz, 2012). These three concepts should be at the foundation of any social justice development program for educators that is rooted in discussion of asset-based, equity-focused outcomes.

MacDonald and Zeichner (2008) view social justice training in educator development as a way to negotiate difficult political differences within and outside the teacher education community, and to develop and identify specific program practices that prepare educators from a social justice perspective. This process occurs through both a fundamental rethinking of program content and structure (MacDonald & Zeichner, 2008). Conceptually and structurally, they note how social justice education differs from multiculturalism. Conceptually, social justice teacher education “shifts the focus from issues of cultural diversity to issues of social change, making social change and activism central to the vision of teaching and learning promoted” (MacDonald & Zeichner, 2008, p. 597). Structurally, educators must “fundamentally change the structure of programs that tend to marginalize concerns for justice and diversity and separate such foundational concerns from the actual practice of teaching” (MacDonald & Zeichner, 2008, p. 598). Therefore, the discussion of social change and activism also needs to be at the core of social justice educator development programs that are rooted in asset-based, equity-framed principles. The ideas of social change and activism tie in to Cochran-Smith’s (2010) theory of teacher education as to how social justice training for educators should be developed. As Figure 2 indicates, the key aspects of

Cochran-Smith's (2010) theory points out the interrelationships of decisions in social justice educator development programs regarding selection of candidates for the program, curriculum, structures, and collaborators involved in the program, and the intended and expected outcomes of the program.

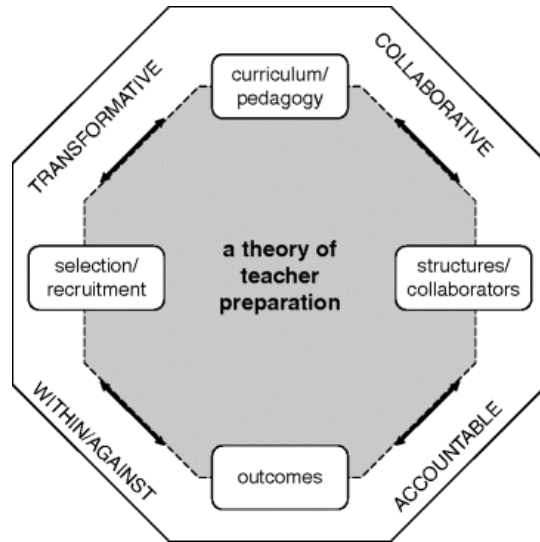


Figure 2 Cochran-Smith (2010) Theory of Social Justice Education

Though educator preparation for implementation of social justice activities can be transformative and collaborative, it also involves working within an accountability system. A program rooted in social justice educator training pushes against the status quo in the recruitment, selection, and retention of candidates; fosters justice in curriculum and pedagogy; involves working with others to become familiar with contexts, structures, and collaborators in the community; and finally, promotes educators' learning and enhancing their life chances in the world (Cochran-Smith, 2010). All of these factors play an important role in establishing an asset-based, equity-framed mentor development program and developing a curriculum that supports the implementation of social justice education.

Cochran-Smith's (2010) theory of teacher preparation (Figure 2) focuses on how educators learn to educate for justice, the structures that support their learning over time, and the outcomes that are appropriate for preparation programs with social justice goals. Cochran-Smith (2010) points out four major premises that form the groundwork for her theory of teacher education for social justice:

- 1) Teacher education for social justice is not just about methods or activities, but a “coherent and intellectual approach to the preparation of teachers that acknowledges the social and political contexts in which teaching, learning, schooling, and ideas about justice have been located historically as well as acknowledging the tensions among competing goals”;
- 2) Teaching and teacher education are “inescapably political and ideological activities in that they inherently involve ideas, ideals, power, and access to learning and life opportunities”;
- 3) Teacher preparation is a key interval in the process of learning to teach with the potential to be a site for educational change; and
- 4) Teacher education for social justice is “for all teacher candidates”. (p. 460)

These concepts are all important to take into account when considering how to best develop educators working with marginalized students in the urban context.

A theoretical framework involving social justice educator training is important to be able to measure the development of conscientization or critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) for educators and mentors supporting students in urban contexts. Therefore, following a model of social justice education would also be important in the development of a program rooted in asset-based, equity-focused practices. However, measurement of the growth and development of

mentors in social justice educator development programs is important in order to determine effectiveness. The concept of critical consciousness, or conscientization, developed by Freire (1970) should be a key measure in evaluating the development of a mentor involved in an asset-based, equity-framed educator development program.

From the literature, we can determine that the key components in an asset-based, equity-framed mentor development program are critical reflection and praxis, critical inquiry, field experiences and community engagement. Through participation in these activities, an educator would be able to gain a deeper understanding of the context of students, families, and communities in urban contexts and to better understand the systemic and institutional racism and classism inherent in systems and institutions.

2.6 Critical Reflection and Praxis

One of the major themes in the research of social justice educator training is the implementation of critical reflection, discussion and action (praxis). Howard (2003) defines critical reflection as the ability to reflect using “moral, political, and ethical contexts” which “is crucial to the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy” (p. 197). In particular, he talks about how critical reflection is particularly important as educators think about their own race and culture along with the race and culture of their students and its impact on teaching practices (praxis).

Milner (2006) discusses interactions and experiences which influence educators’ learning and understanding about urban education and diversity. In order to help preservice educators working in urban contexts develop the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes necessary to teach in highly diverse and urban school contexts, they need cultural and racial awareness and

insight, critical reflection, and the bridging of theory to practice (praxis). Using class discussions, assignments, interviews, and an open-ended feedback questionnaire with 14 preservice teachers, Milner (2006) found that preservice teachers need to:

- 1) recognize differences among perspectives, experiences, values and beliefs of their own and others races and cultures;
- 2) see color and begin to recognize the political and historical issues that frame it;
- 3) become researchers and learners in their teaching environments; and
- 4) build and develop skills to assess their growth and progress and to continue to strengthening their knowledge where issues of diversity are concerned. (p. 370)

These are essential components to be able to have mentors in asset-based, equity-focused development programs be able to actualize.

Similarly, Gay and Kirkland (2003) discuss developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. In particular, they detail techniques such as “creating learning expectations of criticalness, modeling, providing opportunities to practice critical consciousness and translating conceptual multicultural education into K-12 instructional possibilities” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 181). This argument details the importance of not only the critical reflective piece but the action (praxis) and connection to critical consciousness.

2.7 Critical Inquiry

Inquiry is another key aspect of social justice educator training. “Inquiry” is defined as “a guided experience for preservice teachers to challenge existing beliefs, assumptions, and understandings about teaching and learning while valuing their experiences, knowledge and voice”

(Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007, p. 94). They also indicate that inquiry “promotes integration of theoretical and practical knowledge through reflection and dialogue” (p. 94), and found that inquiry promoted a disposition towards critical examination and a shared appreciation of what it means to be a social justice educator. By doing critical inquiry, educators were afforded the opportunity to:

- 1) consult with each other on their understandings of teaching and learning;
- 2) deliberate on problems of teaching along with their possible solutions;
- 3) reflect on the subtleties and complexities of classroom life, which include the social, cultural, and technical dimensions of teaching;
- 4) reflect to a greater degree on their preconceptions of teaching and learning with diverse students;
- 5) examine their roles as reflective practitioners with the ability to interrogate how structures of beliefs that are endemic to teacher culture can isolate them for their own work; and
- 6) cultivate the capacity to examine how structures of beliefs (that are sometimes taken for granted or at other times resisted) in teacher cultures can isolate them for their own work, colleagues, and students.

Picower (2011) used the critical inquiry project (CIP) method because she believed that teachers who enter the field for social change are first to leave after finding themselves alienated trying to navigate political terrain. Collaboration led to models of social justice education and improved ability to teach for social justice, and helped develop leadership and mentorship skills, producing tangible results and implications (Duncan-Andrade 2005; Picower, 2011).

2.8 Field Experiences

Another key theme in the research on social justice educator training is the importance of field experiences in orienting educators to work in urban contexts (Banks, 2015). Field experiences consist of working directly in the classroom with students. Bales and Saffold (2011), for example, discuss their work with field-based “pedagogy labs” used in an urban-focused, collaborative teacher education program. These pedagogy labs were created to link students’ lived experiences to their classroom learning and served as a way to bridge the disconnect between teacher candidates and teachers in public urban schools. The pedagogy lab encouraged teachers to construct pedagogical practices with academically rich content that have relevance to the social and cultural realities of the students attending urban schools (Bales & Saffold, 2011). Through working in the classrooms, Bales and Saffold (2011) were able to critically:

- 1) link students’ lived experiences to their classroom learning and serve as a way to bridge the disconnect between teachers and students in public urban schools; and
- 2) construct pedagogical practices with academically rich content that have relevance to the social and cultural realities of the students attending urban schools.

Waddell and Ukpokodu (2012) describe the effectiveness of field experiences and community immersion in an urban teacher education program. As a result of their research, they were able to increase the diversity of their program candidates, produce successful graduates, expand collaboration with school districts and Arts and Sciences faculty, and become a national model for urban teacher education. Jacobs, Casciola, Ardent, and Mallory (2015) discuss how incorporating culture into the field seminar component of an urban school-university partnership influenced preservice teacher program in order to enhance teachers’ abilities to become critically

conscious. They found an ebb and flow of critical consciousness while also noting that preservice teachers engaged in various levels of praxis throughout the program.

2.9 Community Engagement

Research has demonstrated the need to better incorporate community engagement with academic knowledge in order to enact complex teaching practices that support development of an asset-based mindset (Zeichner, 2010). Community, as defined by Catapano and Huisman (2010) is “the neighborhood, with all of its agencies, cultural organizations, assets and challenges that are located outside of the school building, but that have impact on the lives and academic success of the children” (p. 80). Butcher and colleagues (Butcher et al., 2003) discuss the role of community service learning in teacher education and how this concept should be at the forefront of the conversation regarding teacher reform, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Their research also emphasizes the importance of the university serving as a community partner and corporate citizen. Spalding, Savage, and Garcia (2007) described experiential learning as it relates to preservice teachers and the significant, long-term effect it can have on preservice educators relating to diversity and social justice. Finally, Evans (2013) indicates that effective community partnerships enhance the academic, social, and emotional development of children; increase educators’ confidence and self-awareness; improve educators’ knowledge of diverse families; and enhance educators’ ability to use knowledge about families and communities to improve instruction. Evans (2013) notes that through community engagement activities, educators are able to critically:

- 1) enhance the academic, social, and emotional development of the students with whom they worked;
- 2) increase their confidence and self-awareness;
- 3) improve their knowledge of diverse families; and
- 4) enhance their ability to use knowledge about families and communities to improve instruction.

Jacobs, Casciola, Arndt, and Mallory (2015) discuss using community engagement in urban communities, in combination with praxis (reflection into action), critical inquiry with other educators, and field experiences with children in urban schools as core conceptual educational training competencies for educators. The intersection of all of these as practices were also examined and evaluated in the development of critical consciousness and the implementation of social justice education in the Fellows participating in this program.

2.10 Conclusion

From this literature review, I have constructed an understanding that will frame my inquiry design. Namely, I see the development of school-based mentor programs that incorporate concepts of critical consciousness and social justice education as essential to developing the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions that provide mentors the capacity to understand and align with the Opportunity Gap Framework.

First, based on the literature, social justice education should be at the foundation of school-based mentoring programs that seek to support students in urban contexts. In using this framing, the goal is for mentors to develop an understanding of the backgrounds and culture of their

mentees, which would allow them to build stronger, more meaningful relationships. The development of critical consciousness through this training process will guide building mentoring relationships with students in urban contexts.

Next, the Opportunity Gap Framework provides a valuable theoretical framework for measuring the perception of shifts in mentors' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions from a deficit-minded to an asset-based, equity-framed perspective. The Opportunity Gap Framework is especially effective because it not only focuses on developing relationships with students in urban contexts, but it also provides five measurable constructs that provide different pathways to support mentors.

Finally, though there is not a large body of research that outlines the specific training and curriculum required to incorporate social justice into an asset-based, equity-framed mentor development program, Albright, Hurd, and Hussain (2017) recommend three key aspects for asset-based, equity-framed mentor development training: (a) putting youth "in context" for mentors through education, (b) cultural competency training and guided self-reflection (i.e., examining personal biases and stereotypes), and (c) collaborative learning opportunities for mentor-mentee dyads beyond the initial match. These aspects can be accomplished through implementing a curriculum involving critical inquiry, critical reflection and praxis, community engagement, and field experiences. In order to disrupt the deficit-framed, inequitable practices that are often seen in classrooms in the urban contexts, it is important to train, develop, and equip mentors with the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions required to develop an asset-based, equity-framed mindset through using a combination of the outlined practices.

3.0 Inquiry Plan

The overarching goal of examining the Heinz Fellows Program was to evaluate the shift in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of school-based mentors as a result of participating in an asset-based, equity-focused mentor development program. The inquiry questions that guided this evaluation are:

- 1) How have the Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards opportunity gaps changed throughout the program as a result of the professional development, educational experiences, and interactions with students in the program?
- 2) Which specific professional development opportunities, educational experiences, and interactions with students and teachers in the program have helped to shift the Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards understanding opportunity gaps in supporting students in urban contexts?

3.1 Approach and Methods

Based on the research regarding developing critical mentors and educators who work in urban contexts, an evaluation fits the criteria as an appropriate method of measurement for this inquiry. An evaluation provides the opportunity to make judgments about a program, to improve its effectiveness, and/or to inform programming decisions (Patton, 1987). Previously collected data covering the 2017-2018 cohort of Heinz Fellows was used for data analysis. Both quantitative data using results from the Opportunity Gap survey, and qualitative data from document review of

reflection journals and transcripts from semi-structured interviews, were evaluated to allow for the alignment of the purposes that motivated this research and the procedures used to meet the actual goals of the research (Morgan, 2013). Both the purpose and procedures were used to design the descriptive coding scheme and qualitative analysis of the Heinz Fellows Program.

Through use of evaluation, the Heinz Fellows Program was critically examined and analyzed through the perception of the Fellows regarding the effect and impact of the program's activities and outcomes. Survey results, reflection journal document review, and semi-structured interview transcripts provided several data collection methods with which to contextualize the shift in perceptions that the Fellows have undergone regarding opportunity gaps. Though surveys can provide one way to measure a shift in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions, it was important to allow for more than one method of data collection – not only to help protect against bias but also to provide more richness and depth in examining a construct. Allen, Eby, O'Brien, and Lentz (2008) point out that mentoring scholarship could benefit from more qualitative research, therefore it was useful to analyze reflection journals and semi-structured interview transcripts. Triangulation through multiple methods of data collection is also important because it increases construct validity by providing a more holistic assessment of the construct, and increases the confidence that one can place in research findings (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, and Lentz, 2008; Jick, 1979).

The Opportunity Gap Survey is one instrument that was used to evaluate the shift in mentors' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions regarding supporting students in urban contexts using an Opportunity Gap Framework. Surveys are important tools in identifying the prevalence of a particular variable or concept and for precisely measuring these specific variables (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, and Lentz, 2007; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999). Previous research has pointed to the effectiveness of using surveys in measuring shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and

dispositions. For example, Lee, Eckrick, Lackey and Showalter (2010) found that using attitudinal surveys such as the Opportunity Gap Survey in a pre/post course to measure preservice teacher intentions to teach in an urban setting was an effective way to measure how attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors changed as a result of a developmental program.

In addition, document review in the form of coding reflection journals and transcripts from semi-structured interviews was used to identify and evaluate any shifts in the Fellows' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions around supporting students in urban contexts using an Opportunity Gap Framework. Document review provides insight by allowing access to information that may have otherwise been unavailable or unknown from observations, specifically looking at elicited documents or those that the researcher asks the participants to create as part of the data collection process (Charmaz, 2011; Mertens, 2015). Reflection journals completed and submitted electronically by the Fellows throughout the program were coded and themed, similar to methods that Moore (2007) and Jacobs, Casciola, Arndt, and Mallory (2015) used when researching how educators experienced changing critical consciousness as the year in which they were involved in social justice educator training progressed and as they engaged in various levels of praxis throughout the year. Semi-structured interviews provide respondents with the opportunity to provide answers guided around themes related to coding and the theoretical framework used in the evaluation, which is why these interviews were important data to evaluate. For example, in prior research Picower (2011) found in her work with the development of social justice educators that semi-structured interviews provided social justice educators with the opportunity to discuss overarching activities in the training program and attribute particular shifts in beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions to specific aspects of the training program. These semi-structured interviews were

recorded in the Center for Urban Education, transcribed by a third party, and were coded by myself. Below I describe how each method was used to address each inquiry question.

***Inquiry Question #1:** How have the Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards opportunity gaps changed throughout the program as a result of the professional development, educational experiences and interactions with students in the program?*

These inquiry questions were addressed using results from the Opportunity Gap Survey. The Opportunity Gap Survey was chosen as an instrument because it is a useful tool in measuring educators' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions around opportunity gaps in an asset-based, equity-focused manner. The Opportunity Gap Survey (Appendix A) is a 25-question, 5-point Likert-scaled survey tool developed by Dr. H. Richard Milner and Dr. Dianne Mark. This survey measures participants' understanding of the concept of opportunity gaps regarding five major tenets: educators' use of colorblind practices (colorblindness), the inability of educators to work through cultural conflicts (cultural conflicts), educator's embracing of the myth of meritocracy (meritocracy), educators' having low expectations and carrying deficit mindsets of students in urban contexts (low expectations/deficit mindsets), and educators' embracing context neutral practices when working with students in urban contexts (context-neutral mindsets). This survey was administered at two different points of the evaluation: when the Fellows began the program and again at the end of the year-long program.

***Inquiry Question #2:** Which specific professional development opportunities, educational experiences, and interactions with students and teachers in the program have helped to shift the Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards understanding opportunity gaps in supporting students in urban contexts?*

The second inquiry question was addressed using document review of reflective journals and transcripts from semi-structured interviews. The Fellows completed reflection journals periodically throughout the program and submitted them to me electronically. The purpose of the reflection journal is to support Fellows in thinking deeply about a question and how it relates to praxis while giving the Fellows opportunities to provide examples specific connected to the training program, educational opportunities, or field experiences. Some examples of the reflection questions include “What aspect of training do you feel best prepared you for working in the schools?” and “What are some of the assets that you have noticed in the school site that you are working at?” (see Appendix B for additional questions). In addition to the reflection journals, I analyzed data from the semi-structured interviews conducted and recorded at the conclusion of the Fellows program. These interviews offered the Fellows with an opportunity to expand upon their perceptions of the impact of specific aspects of the program. These recorded interviews were transcribed by a third party. The protocol for these interviews is included in Appendix C.

3.2 Participants

The Heinz Fellows Program was established with the mission of forwarding CUE’s commitment to developing and improving the overall landscape of urban education, increasing the teacher-of-color pipeline, and developing the quality of instruction of educators in the Pittsburgh region. The Fellows were divided equitably at three separate PPS sites: Pittsburgh Miller African-Centered Academy (Miller), Pittsburgh A. Leo Weil Elementary (Weil), and Pittsburgh University Preparatory at Margaret Milliones (UPrep). Each cohort of Fellows worked at their respective site for one full academic school year. The Fellows served as school-based mentors, supporting

students academically and socio-emotionally in their respective schools. Student mentees were assigned to Fellows through self-selection (meaning the student requested a specific mentor), observation by the Fellows of students who may need support, or assignment by a teacher and/or school principal.

One cohort of 15 Heinz Fellows who participated in the program during the 2017-2018 academic school year served as the participants in this study. Fellows were selected following a rigorous interview process and chosen based on the belief that they had the potential and capability to support students in urban contexts academically and socioemotionally while working towards developing their own critical consciousness through asset-based, equity-framed mentor development training. The racial and gender demographic of this cohort was as follows: Six Fellows identified as African-American/Black male, four Fellows identified as African-American/Black female, two Fellows identified as white/female, two Fellows identified as white/male, and one Fellow identified as white/queer (see Table 1 and Table 2).

3.3 Data Collection

This study was conducted using pre-existing data collected from the first cohort of Fellows located at the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh over the 2016-2017 school year. The data I evaluated and analyzed included: 1) the results of the Opportunity Gap Survey completed at the start of the program and at the end of the program by the Fellows, 2) document analysis of reflection journals completed by the Fellows, and 3) document analysis of transcribed semi-structured interviews with the Fellows. The Fellows all signed compliance forms

for research at the start of the program and gave verbal consent to being interviewed and recorded during the interview.

The Fellows completed the Opportunity Gap Survey at two separate points during the program: first at the beginning of the program, which provided a baseline understanding of their understanding regarding opportunity gaps and supporting students with an asset-based, equity-framed mindset and again at the end of the year-long program. The Opportunity Gap Survey is a 5-scale Likert survey with 25 questions, with responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” used to determine the level of understanding of building upon assets, developing relationships with students, and promoting equitable classrooms. The Opportunity Gaps Survey is based on Milner’s (2010) five constructs regarding supporting students in urban contexts:

- 1) conceptions of color blindness (race)
- 2) cultural conflicts (culture)
- 3) the myth of meritocracy (socioeconomic status)
- 4) deficit mindsets and low expectations (belief systems)
- 5) context neutral mindsets (social contexts)

The 25 questions on the survey are broken into five categories coinciding with Milner’s framework listed above. Each group of five questions corresponds to each of the five tenets listed above (i.e., Questions 1-5 are regarding conceptions of colorblindness, Questions 6-10 are regarding cultural conflicts, Questions 11-15 are regarding meritocracy, etc.) Throughout the program, Fellows also completed reflection journals that were guided by structured questions and submitted to me electronically. At the end of the year-long program, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Fellows, with questions revolving around the training program,

professional development opportunities, and educational and field experiences of the Fellows. All of these data were existing data gathered by the CUE staff and saved in a secure Box account online.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis began with using a paired t-test analysis of the Opportunity Gap Survey results from prior to and at the conclusion of the program. A paired t-test was used because it allows comparisons of the means of two samples in which observations in one sample can be paired with observations in the other sample. In this case, the pre- and post- Opportunity Gap Survey results for each individual Fellow were used for the paired t-test.

Data were gathered from reflection journals that the Fellows kept during the program and from interviews conducted at the end of the program. These qualitative data were initially coded deductively using codes developed from the Opportunity Gap Framework (Milner, 2012), namely Milner's definitions of the five tenets (colorblindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, low expectations/deficit mindset, context-neutral mindsets). After selected excerpts were coded with one of the five tenets, data under each tenet were analyzed and grouped into categories that identified changes in the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of the Fellows as they related to each specific tenet. From these categories, inductive analyses revealed themes that emerged related to how Fellows had changed relative to each tenet. These themes demonstrated key findings from the research.

Using a combination of the quantitative scores from the Opportunity Gap Survey, shifts along the Opportunity Gap scale, coding from the reflection journals and recorded semi-structured

interviews with the Fellows, a descriptive narrative around program experiences and perceptions of these experiences on the understanding of opportunity gaps was developed for the Fellows based upon the five concepts of the Opportunity Gap Framework.

4.0 Findings

The evaluation for this study was conducted using the following data artifacts: (1) Opportunity Gap Surveys (Appendix A) completed by the Heinz Fellows both prior to the start of and upon completion of the program, (2) electronic reflection journals completed by the Fellows periodically throughout the duration of the one-year program, and (3) semi-structured interviews conducted with Fellows at the conclusion of the program. See Appendix C for the interview protocol. There were 15 total Heinz Fellows from whom data was collected; however, one Fellow opted out of completing a final interview. The self-identified demographics of the Fellows are as follows:

Table 3 2017-2018 Heinz Fellows Demographics

| Heinz Fellows Demographics | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| <i>Gender</i> | <i>Race/Ethnicity</i> | |
| | Black | White |
| Male | 6 | 2 |
| Female | 4 | 2 |
| Queer | 0 | 1 |

As the table indicates, the program had a total of 15 Fellows, with eight of these identified as male, six identified as female and one who identified as queer. Regarding race/ethnicity demographics, ten Fellows identified as Black/African-American and five identified as white.

The data will be presented first with a summary of a quantitative analysis of the pre- and post- findings from the Opportunity Gap Survey using each of the five tenets of the Opportunity Gap Framework (colorblindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, low expectations/deficit mindset, context neutral-mindsets). Following a summary of the quantitative findings, the qualitative

findings from the reflection journals and semi-structured interviews will be described to provide more context to understand the perceived shifts that took place in the Fellows’ attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions as a result of the program.

4.1 Opportunity Gap Survey Results

The Opportunity Gap Survey administered both at the beginning and end of the program provided data that demonstrates the perceived shifts in understanding of opportunity gaps that the Fellows experienced as a group throughout the program. Using a paired t-test analysis of the Opportunity Gap Survey results from these two instances, the Fellows showed a statistically significant positive shift towards increased alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework in all five tenets. Table 4 demonstrates the results from each survey by tenet.

Table 4 Heinz Fellows Opportunity Gap Survey Results Pre- and Post- Fellowship (N = 15)

| | Pre-Fellowship | | Post-Fellowship | | Pre-post Change | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----|-----------------|------|-----------------|------|-------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | % | | |
| Colorblindness | 4.12 | * | 0.58 | 4.45 | * | 0.31 | 8.01 |
| Cultural Conflict | 3.15 | *** | 0.56 | 3.93 | *** | 0.43 | 24.76 |
| Meritocracy | 3.77 | * | 0.50 | 4.18 | * | 0.46 | 10.88 |
| Low Expectations | 3.46 | *** | 0.60 | 4.06 | *** | 0.63 | 17.34 |
| Context Neutral | 3.44 | ** | 0.44 | 3.90 | ** | 0.38 | 13.37 |
| TOTAL | 3.57 | *** | 0.32 | 4.09 | *** | 0.27 | 14.57 |

(*p<.1 **p<.05 ***p<.001)

As Table 4 indicates, the increase in means of all five tenets of the Opportunity Gap Survey were statistically significant from the start of the program to the conclusion for the Fellows. Cultural conflicts showed the largest increase by 24.76%, followed by low expectation/deficit mindset by 17.34%, with context neutral mindset (13.37%), meritocracy (10.88%), and colorblindness (8.01%) all respectively showing smaller increases. The standard deviation of the means decreased across four out of the five tenets as well (context-neutral mindset being the only exception). This indicates that not only did the Fellows align more with the Opportunity Gap Framework at the end of the program, but also they showed less variation among responses. This indicates that not only were Fellows more aligned with the Opportunity Gap Framework, but as a group there was more shared agreement around survey responses. This also shows that the Heinz Fellows programming helps to create some shared agreement around the Opportunity Gap Framework from participants as well.

4.2 Reflection Journal and Interview Results

To understand how Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions shifted as a result of this program, I sought to review how Fellows described the program activities that supported their shifts in understanding around the five tenets of the Opportunity Gap Framework. I did not seek to prove whether the Opportunity Gap Framework was correct or incorrect, but rather I used it as a tool to see how the Fellows described how their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions shifted around the concepts of the opportunity gaps. The reflection journals and interviews were initially deductively coded by using Milner's Opportunity Gap Framework to pull transcript excerpts which either aligned with or against one of the five tenets

(colorblindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, deficit mindset/low expectations, context-neutral mindsets). Once those excerpts were pulled, they were grouped together and inductive codes were established. From these inductive codes, themes were created based on the context of the pulled excerpts. Figure 3 is an excerpt of the codebook that was used to draw themes from the data. It contains an example of the deductive code (“colorblindness”), the excerpts pulled from reflection journals and interviews that either aligned or did not align with that specific deductive code, and the inductive code used to group the excerpts (“implicit bias/unconscious bias”). The inductive codes were then grouped to extract overarching themes from the evaluation.

| Colorblindness (Deductive) | Reflection Journal and Interview Quotes | |
|--|--|--|
| Implicit Bias/Unconscious Bias (Inductive) | not conscious to the racism they exhibited | |
| | a lot of her responses and remarks were grounded in misunderstanding of race | |
| | The district as a whole showed institutionalized racism. They show emphasis to certain schools. | |
| | they don't know what experiences our students have with incarceration | |
| | the way that teachers treated our students, it was unfair. It was unjust treatment and it was belittling. It was bringing their own biases into the classroom, stereotyping our children and not educating them. I definitely saw teachers who pushed students on through and had favoritism towards student | |

Figure 3 Sample Codebook

The five themes that emerged from these data were that perceived shifts occurred due to: (1) critical race reflection; (2) context observations of cultural discontinuity; (3) critical institutionalism; (4) critical mentoring practices; and (5) exposure to research and lectures around equity and culturally relevant practices. Below I describe each finding.

4.2.1 Finding #1: Fellows experienced perceived shifts due to critical race reflection.

Fellows reported that discussions with teachers, students, and other Fellows around race, identity, and positionality, along with critical reflections on these conversations (Howard, 2003; Milner, 2006; Kohli, 2009) caused perceived shifts in their attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and dispositions. Fellows discussed how unconscious, implicit bias and explicit bias exhibited by teachers and administrators (who were predominately white but sometimes Black) in their schools specifically caused shifts in how the Fellows viewed discussions of race, class, and context in supporting predominately Black students in urban contexts. These perceptions coming from teachers and administrators were primarily shaped by their upbringing or deficit media representations of black people.

In addition, the way that teachers and administrators embraced deficit mindsets and low expectations towards predominately Black students, and the cultural conflicts that Fellows witnessed between teachers and administrators (predominately white but sometimes Black) also led to shifts in Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions toward aligning with the Opportunity Gap Framework. Several Fellows discussed how they came into the program either thinking that race in the classroom "was not much of an issue" or how they were taught that it was a topic that should not be discussed in the classroom. During the program, these Fellows came to realize how much race affected how white teachers and administrators supported Black students, and how Black students interpreted the way that they were treated by their teachers and administrators. Regarding feelings towards discussion of race in the classroom, one Fellow commented that:

I feel like when I first started the program, I really didn't think it would be much of an issue, but as the year went on I can tell that people were not comfortable when talking

about race.... I didn't think race was that deep in the classroom initially. Like when we are learning something, you don't think that race would be a concern. But you are also dealing with people who may not have those experiences when growing up so now I have to think about it....So I have to consider race in the classroom...everyone is different and you have to build a rapport.

In addition, Fellows had critical discussion around how their own race and positionality in the classroom also affected how teachers and administrators talked to them about race and how Fellows themselves were perceived, interacted with, and developed relationships with students. Several of the white Fellows commented specifically on how being white played a vital role in what teachers and administrators said to them about Black students as opposed to what was said to their Black colleagues. These interactions caused perceived shifts in how some Fellows provided support to students. One Fellow remarked:

I used to go into a classroom where I had some of my mentees and this particular class the students didn't particularly care for the teacher. All the students were Black and this teacher was white. I didn't want to pull the students out so I would go in the class to assist them while she instructed and work as a buffer. She liked me a lot but I wasn't able to verify this but I think it was because she was white and I am white. I observed that a lot of her responses and remarks were grounded in misunderstanding of race. She thought the kids didn't like her because she was white and she accused them of showing racism towards her. So, I would step in and speak with the student's prior [to them becoming upset with her] or when the opportunity presented. The students would accept me saying some things versus her saying them.

Though interactions like this were often mentioned between white teachers and white Fellows, black Fellows did not discuss having experiences like this with white teachers.

4.2.2 Finding #2: Fellows experienced perceived shifts due to context observations of cultural discontinuity.

Fellows observed that classrooms, curriculum, and disciplinary policies created by teachers and administrators often did not account for the cultural differences between these teachers and administrators and students' cultural backgrounds, which created cultural discontinuity (Self & Milner, 2012). Further, Fellows reported observing that a lack of common understanding or agreement of rules and regulations led to cultural disconnect and created cultural conflicts between teachers/administrators and students. Fellows noted that students were often disciplined and punished for subjective infractions, which were often labeled as “behavior” or “conduct” issues but were often a result of cultural differences. Examples of this would include students being penalized for subjective infractions such as “being disrespectful” or “talking too loud” and wearing sweatshirt hoods in class, even on cold, snowy days. Fellows found that students would lose “privileges” like lunch or recess or even worse, be referred to the office, removed from class, or suspended due to the inability of some teachers to understand and work through cultural conflicts. Some Fellows noted how the cultural discontinuity often revolved around themes such as “power”, “control”, and “discipline” within the classroom and building. These Fellows noted how they grew up believing that teachers needed to have power and control of the students in their classroom in order to instill discipline in students, because that is how a classroom was supposed to operate. However, they experienced shifts in this thinking based on being in this program and realizing that classroom culture should be co-constructed.

Several Fellows commented that though teachers and administrators discussed how they “cared” or loved their students, true equity was not found in the classroom because students were not allowed to co-create a culture or classrooms did not offer space for “empathy, love and respect” for all students. When discussing how co-creation of culture in a classroom between students and teachers can assist in supporting the classroom, one Fellow explained:

Coming into the fellowship, I was thinking like most [others]- This is my classroom and I create the culture for students to follow. That was my thoughts because I was fresh from being a substitute teacher to entering the fellowship. I experienced what maintaining a classroom entails. When I entered the fellowship, I was fresh from blatant disrespect from students and not having the resources to have successful classroom management. [I now realize] Classroom culture is co-created from both teacher and students. Dictating and guiding are two different things. You can be directive and tell students what to do or you can guide them to participate in the planning process, they will respect you and the subject more.

From this Fellow’s statement, he explains how his perceived mindset shifted from more of a dictatorial classroom setting to a co-created classroom structure based on his experiences within the program.

4.2.3 Finding #3: Fellows experienced perceived shifts due to critical institutionalism.

Fellows discussed how they experienced perceived shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and dispositions by recognizing how resources were allocated in schools by factors including neighborhoods in which the schools were located, property taxes and the socioeconomic status of those neighborhoods, a power analysis referred to as critical institutionalism (Clever & de

Koning, 2015). Several Fellows described their realization that student success is often a function of other systemic factors and that school and environmental factors played a large role as to whether or not the students Fellows supported were “successful”, irrespective of how hard the student worked. Some of these themes around school and environment factors that Fellows discussed included having qualified teachers in the building, access to equitable resources, and proper access to academically enriching opportunities within the school. Many of the Fellows critically reflected upon what they were taught and raised to believe regarding working hard and the idea of meritocracy. Fellows also had educational experiences, both through the research articles provided in the program and the presentations and discussions throughout the program, that led them to realize their own privilege in having resources, systems and people who supported them throughout their educational journey and provided the foundation for them to be “successful”. In discussing a power analysis of critical institutionalism, one Fellow made the following remark:

Yeah, I always thought that you have to put in some sort of effort in anything you do. But systemic issues cause people that work hard to still end up getting the short end of the stick. More so, you still need people to support you to get success regardless of what you do. I know I did a lot to be successful, but I got help from people along the way. After being in the program I realize just how much more help I got from people and how good they were to me.

Some Fellows, however, maintained a belief that hard work, regardless of systemic and institutional barriers, still carried importance in determining student outcomes. One Fellow in particular noted her own life experiences and said, “I think it a question of degree. Hard work and effort will lead to a degree of success. You can make it being hard-working regardless of

upbringing.” Therefore, not all Fellows were convinced that institutional and systemic barriers played a large part in determining student success.

4.2.4 Finding #4: Fellows experienced perceived shifts through critical mentoring practices with students.

Fellows were able to experience perceived shifts in their attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards the Opportunity Gap Framework from supporting and building relationships with students, focusing on the intersection of critical race theory and mentorship. Students would discuss with Fellows how they were affected by punitive disciplinary policies, disconnects in culture between themselves and teachers/administrators, and deficit mindsets/low expectations also exhibited by teachers/administrators, typically tied to racism. In addition, Fellows realized from being in the classroom, and observing and talking to students that many students were “not asked to think critically” and were not “challenged” by much of the work that they received. Through conversations with students and teachers, Fellows realized how unaware many of the teachers were about students’ home lives, the deficit assumptions they made about their students’ families and communities, and the feelings that many teachers had towards the capacity of students to do the work that was required of them. Several Fellows discussed how they saw themselves recognizing that students brought what they could to the classrooms and how they felt that it was their role to “meet students where they were at.” In this way, they approached student support from an asset-based standpoint in order to build upon student strengths instead of focusing on deficits. Regarding this shift towards an asset-based way of thinking about students, one Fellow said:

I think when I came in I definitely had messages of deep deficit mindset that I was holding on to....I think it goes back to the way my perspective has shifted over the course of the

year. It's not the students that are lacking in what they need and if they are lacking in what they need, it's not because of their home environments, it's because of school environments.

Therefore, it was not from simple mentoring practices that the Fellows experienced these perceived shifts but rather from the intersection of the tenets of critical race theory along with mentoring practices which caused these perceived shifts.

4.2.5 Finding #5: Fellows experienced perceived shifts due to exposure to research and lectures around equity and culturally relevant practices.

Fellows indicated that reading and learning about equity and culturally relevant practices during the program provided some tangible examples of how context-neutral practices can be ineffective when supporting students, particularly students of color in urban contexts. Gaining this knowledge and experience led to perceived shifts in the Fellows' attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards aligning with the opportunity gap framework. Several Fellows mentioned how important the concept of creating an equitable, culturally relevant environment was to enhance student engagement, in addition to "just knowing your subject matter". Many Fellows also noted how inequitable the resources were in the buildings that they worked in comparison to other school buildings in the same district and within close proximity to their schools. One Fellow remarked that resources were even more important than equity and culturally relevant practices:

I believed that going into the program that if I had the necessary tools like culturally responsive practices or an equity mindset, I could go into any schools and help the students get through their problems and I would be able to help them. However, it's clear that the amount of resources is not the same in every school.

On the other hand, some Fellows felt that the location of the school should not matter when supporting students. These Fellows felt that educators should be prepared to engage students and build relationships even when schools may be under resourced. One Fellow commented:

Initially, I thought if I know what I'm talking about I can get the students to be interested and learn. But seeing how difficult that can still be, I remain neutral....It doesn't matter where the school is. The students are getting there every day so I should be there every day ready....It should not hinder my success....At first, I was like, yes, put them in any class and students can be successful. However, depending on the teacher they may or may not be successful.

4.3 Conclusion

In this section, I presented findings indicating how the Heinz Fellows' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions shifted as a result of participation in this program based on the Opportunity Gap Survey administered before and after the program. First, the study showed that looking at the means of the survey results, the degree to which the Fellows increased as a group towards increased alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework across all five tenets (colorblindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, low expectation/deficit mindset, context-neutral mindsets) was statistically significant. The largest increase in means was the tenet of cultural conflicts, which increased by 24.76% as an average across all of the Fellows from the beginning of the program to the end. Though not all Fellows showed increases in every tenet, the majority of Fellows increased across all tenets. Findings also showed less variation from the Fellows

regarding their responses to the Opportunity Gap Survey at the end of the program in comparison to the beginning of the program.

I also evaluated the activities to which Fellows attributed their perceived shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions based on data found in their reflection journals and interview transcripts. The five themes that demonstrate the ways that the Fellows experienced perceived shifts were: (1) critical race reflection; (2) context observations of cultural discontinuity; (3) critical institutionalism; (4) critical mentoring practices; and (5) exposure to research and lectures around equity and culturally relevant practices. Though some Fellows felt that hard work had more importance than systemic and institutional barriers regarding student success, and some Fellows felt that the location of the school was not as important to student success compared to student engagement and relationship building by educators, the majority of Fellows described how they experienced positive shifts in their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions as a result of the program.

5.0 Discussion

The purpose of this evaluation was twofold: first, to determine if the professional development opportunities, educational experiences, and interactions with students in an asset-based, equity-focused school-based mentoring program could be associated with shifting perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of those who participated in the program (the Heinz Fellows Program). The second purpose was to determine which experiences the Fellows draw on as connected towards potential shifts in understanding and aligning with an opportunity gap framework in supporting students in urban contexts. For this evaluation, I used a mixed methods study in which 15 participants (the Heinz Fellows) completed an Opportunity Gap Survey prior to beginning the program and again at the conclusion of the program, in addition to the Fellows completing reflection journals submitted electronically throughout the program and participating in a semi-structured interview at the conclusion of the program. The Heinz Fellows were presented with professional development opportunities and educational experiences through the Center for Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh along with supporting students at three Pittsburgh Public Schools in the Hill District area of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania through a program funded by The Heinz Endowments. The Heinz Fellows included the following self-identified individuals: four Black females, six Black males, two white females, two white males and one white queer individual.

Weiston-Serdan's (2017) model of critical mentoring heavily influenced the design of the training of the Heinz Fellows Program with a focus on building and partnering with the community in the training of mentors in a culturally relevant way as discussed by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) and Gay (2002, 2010), among others. In addition, resources such as *Elements of Effective Practice*

for Mentoring (MENTOR, 2015a), *Guide to Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color* (MENTOR, 2015b), and *The ABCs of School-Based Mentoring* (Garringer, 2008) were used to provide reference materials for myself, as the Executive Manager of the Program, as well as for the Heinz Fellows, who served as the mentors. The Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate program discussed in *More Than A Mentoring Program: Attacking Institutional Racism* (Meyer & Noblit, 2018), which is rooted in antiracism training for mentors, was also examined as a model for the structure of the Heinz Fellows Program. All of these resources stressed the importance of involving community, building relationships and developing trust, and understanding race, identity, and culture when designing an asset-based, equity-focused, school-based mentoring program that specifically supports minoritized and marginalized students in urban contexts.

5.1 Key Findings

Milner's (2010, 2012) Opportunity Gap Framework provided the theoretical framework for this evaluation. The quantitative analysis of the Opportunity Gap Survey showed that as a group, the Heinz Fellows demonstrated a statistically significant positive shift towards increased alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework in all five tenets of the framework (colorblindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, low expectations/deficit mindset, context neutral mindsets). The qualitative data from reflection journals and semi-structured interviews provided more context about how the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of the Fellows shifted, as well as identified which particular activities in the program they believed caused this shift. From the findings discussed in the previous section, several conclusions can be made regarding the

perceived shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions around the opportunity gap framework from the quantitative and qualitative findings.

5.1.1 Key Conclusion #1

The experiences of the Fellows in the program – specifically around perceived shifts in their attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions – differed depending upon the race of the Fellow. School-based mentor programs should be mindful regarding the different racialized experiences that mentors may encounter.

Further analysis of the five tenets of the Opportunity Gap Framework provided the following findings:

5.1.1.1 Colorblindness.

In order to show alignment with an Opportunity Gap Framework, Fellows should show “The ability to reject the notion of color blindness” (Milner, 2013). The white Fellows, as a group, showed more alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework at the start of the program as compared as a group to the Black Fellows, according to the Opportunity Gap Survey. Reviewing results of the reflection journals and interviews, white Fellows tended to shift their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards more alignment with rejecting the notion of colorblindness based on discussions with white teachers about Black students that were rooted in stereotypes, racist ideas and biased comments. Black Fellows, on the other hand, seemed to experience positive shifts in aligning with the Opportunity Gap Framework and rejecting the notion of colorblindness more through interactions with students (particularly Black students) and hearing what these students had to say regarding how they thought race played a factor in how

they were treated by teachers, administrators, and other school district representatives. Much of this can be attributed to a variety of factors specifically revolving around prior schooling experiences that the Black Fellows had and the research and professional development they received around equity and culturally relevant practices.

5.1.1.2 Cultural conflicts.

In order to show alignment with an Opportunity Gap Framework, Fellows should show “The ability and skill to understand, work through and transcend cultural conflicts” (Milner, 2013). Based on the results of the Opportunity Gap Survey, though most of the white Fellows did not show much of a perceived shift in alignment with cultural conflicts because they already measured relatively high at the beginning of the program. One white Fellow, who did show a large positive increase in aligning with the ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend cultural conflicts, discussed how the professional development sessions and educational experiences around equity and culturally relevant practices shifted his thoughts on culturally what “equity” means in regards to race and education. He remarked, “I thought that treating all students the same was equity when it really is not. You have to treat each student differently...”

Most of the Black Fellows who experienced significant positive shifts in alignment with cultural conflicts discussed how their own personal experiences with “power” and “control” in the classroom before the program shaped their thoughts on how teachers should treat students in order to instill discipline and classroom management. However, working directly in the classroom and observing the disconnect, primarily between white teachers and Black students, and how punitive discipline was enforced and behavior was heavily policed, caused the Black Fellows particularly to shift more towards alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework.

5.1.1.3 Meritocracy.

In order to show alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework, Fellows should show “The ability to understand how meritocracy operates” (Milner, 2013). Though most white Fellows showed little shifts in this tenet based on the Opportunity Gap Survey, many Black Fellows did demonstrate large positive shifts in alignment with understanding meritocracy and how it operates. Based on reflection journal and interview data, most of the Black Fellows who experienced positive shifts in alignment with understanding how meritocracy operates did so through critical reflection of how they were successful in their own lives and witnessing the lack of opportunity to resources and social capital the students that they supported had. As one Black Fellow remarked, “I guess what I failed to see...is that they [students] may not be hardworking because this environment doesn’t suit them.”

5.1.1.4 Low Expectations/Deficit Mindsets.

In order to show alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework, Fellows should show “The ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mind-sets” (Milner, 2013). Based on results of the Opportunity Gap Survey, some white Fellows showed large positive increases in alignment with the ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mindsets. Reviewing results of the reflection journals and interviews, white Fellows tended to shift their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards more alignment with the ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mindsets, similar to colorblindness, based on discussions with white teachers about Black students that were rooted in racist ideas and biased comments. Specifically, many teachers expressed to white Fellows the “doubt” that they had about the ability of these Black students to “think critically” and “do challenging work”. Many Black Fellows also exhibited positive shifts in alignment with the ability to recognize and shift low expectations and

deficit mindsets. However, from their reflection journals and interview comments, the Black Fellows exhibited shifts in this tenet mainly due to supporting students and learning about their family backgrounds or challenges that these students had in their lives.

Though Black Fellows did recognize the challenges within some families, homes, and communities of students in urban contexts, many of them still used deficit language when discussing their students. For example, one Black Fellow commented that “The reality is that some of them don’t have the skills...” while another Black Fellow commented that “Homecare is the problem.” Additionally, one of these Fellows was the only Fellow to experience a decrease in alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework under this tenet from the start of the program to the end based on the results of the Opportunity Gap Survey.

5.1.1.5 Context-neutral mindsets.

In order to show alignment with an Opportunity Gap Framework, Fellows should show “The ability to reject context-neutral mindsets and practices” (Milner, 2013). According to the results of the Opportunity Gap Survey, most Fellows did not shift much in this tenet. However, those that did show larger shifts were Black Fellows. Several Black Fellows showed large positive shifts in the ability to reject context-neutral mindsets and practices due to the knowledge that they gained in the program through the professional development opportunities and educational experiences, which included discussion around equity, culturally relevant practices and those which discussed systemic and institutional inequalities. However, many of these Black Fellows that experienced these positive shifts towards aligning with the ability to reject context-neutral mindsets and practices also noted that it should be the job of the educator to be able to reach and engage children, no matter what the context of the school environment was. As one Black Fellow stated regarding the responsibility being on the educator and not the context:

It doesn't matter where the school is. The students are getting there every day so I should be there every day ready to provide instruction and direction for the students. It should not hinder my success of [supporting] students.

Therefore, in summary, though the Fellows as a group showed positive increases in shifting towards alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework, the experiences which led to the shifts differed for the Fellows depending on race.

5.1.2 Key Conclusion #2

Though critical inquiry, critical reflection, research, lectures and field experiences led to perceived shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and dispositions for the Heinz Fellows, orientation and training played a large factor in laying the foundation for the positive shifts that Fellows experienced. Mentor programs must provide space and time for discussion and reflection, along with setting program expectations during orientation and training.

Fellows mentioned that a key aspect of the program that allowed them to experience shifts in perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions was through dialogue with colleagues and presenters, in what Lynn and Smith-Maddox (2007) refers to as “critical inquiry”. Fellows mentioned how talking to their colleagues, both at the weekly professional development sessions and in their school sites, provided the opportunity to consult with each other, deliberate on problems, and examine their roles in their school sites. Similar to the models used by Duncan-Andrade (2005) and Picower (2011), providing a space and time for discussion between the Heinz Fellows provided the opportunity for the Fellows to be able to discuss specific issues and challenges, problem solve, and be there for one another in a supportive, collaborative way. As one Fellow remarked regarding having discussions with colleagues:

In the beginning of the year, I didn't think I would have any issues or reservations talking about race [with colleagues], but as the year progressed....By the end of the year, I realized that a student's race, it definitely affected how I personally choose to operate....And talking to my Black colleagues, I more so understand now that being a black person [mentor] in a [predominately black] school doesn't necessarily make things easier....

Discussions such as these led many Fellows to shift their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards more in alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework.

Another way that Fellows experienced perceived shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions was through what Howard (2003) referred to as "critical reflection and praxis" (2003). Mentors would think about their own race and culture along with the race and culture of their students and its impact on teaching practices, along with disciplinary policies, inequitable resources, and deficit mindsets. One Fellow commented that:

When I started this fellowship, I was feeling like I paid attention to a lot of social issues in the Black community and either via Facebook or Twitter, I would be vocal and opinionated about things going on in the community. And I feel that coming to a program that is based in social justice education, coming into the program I thought it was about having these difficult conversations. However, being in the program with people that can see and react personally to your reactions can create a hostile environment. When you are actually working side by side with people that don't agree with you makes a major difference. Then you run into the issue of trust because you wonder if you can trust in your teammates when they have different ideologies and thoughts than you do about race and equality

In addition, many of the Fellows discussed, though it was difficult at times, how they would take some of the theory that they had learned in professional development sessions and education experiences and use these theories in practice in supporting their students.

Many Fellows pointed to the importance of the orientation and training sessions, which occurred prior to the Fellows entering the school, that started to have them think about opportunity gaps and shifting their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions. Weiston-Serdan (2017) specifically points out how important mentor training is when developing a program around critical mentoring. Specifically, the research shows that training is “perhaps the most critical area for making a positive impact on the effectiveness of mentoring for BYMOC” (MENTOR, 2015b, p. 11). Referring specifically to the training, one Fellow commented:

I believe the training has helped us not only better understand ourselves, but as we shared our stories and experiences, we got a chance to understand and establish relationships with the other fellows in our cohort....you must first understand yourself before you can effectively support and mentor others.

In summary, though perceived shifts in attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions occurred primarily due to critical inquiry, critical reflection, research, lectures and field experiences, many Fellows pointed to how the orientation and training set the foundation that led to the perceived shift in mindset.

5.1.3 Key Conclusion #3

The lack of clarity around the roles of the Heinz Fellows presented issues at times in their effectiveness and ability to create change. This often led to negative shifts in perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts and dispositions away from alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework.

Mentor programs need to be specific and deliberate about outlining roles, job descriptions, and expected outcomes with administration, teachers, and students prior to mentors entering their school sites.

Fellows often discussed how difficult it was to mentor and support students in urban contexts in an asset-based, equity-framed way with an Opportunity Gap Framework. Research shows that school-based mentors often struggle to find their proper place in the school environment (Garringer, 2008). Though teachers, administrators, and the district may have all played roles, the overarching theme was that institutionalized and systemic racism was the most prevalent issue for the Fellows in preventing them from being able to create sustainable and transformative change for their students. It was not necessarily people, but rather inequitable systems, structures, policies, and practices that created obstacles for the Fellows. In addition, the fact that they were not employees of the school district but were employed by the University of Pittsburgh and CUE, and that their roles were not clearly defined by school leaders created a multitude of issues for the Fellows. However, one Fellow best summarized how they saw their role in the school play out over the year, despite the challenges:

I can also support students in having a safe learning environment by pushing back against inequitable policies and practices when I am able to, and by helping students to find language with which to advocate for themselves....Helping students to questions systems and not authority and encouraging students to think beyond the current situation but working through conflict and communicating issues in order to get the necessary assistance.

Therefore, though lack of clarity played a large role in the difficulty that Fellows faced, some Fellows still found ways to navigate often inequitable, oppressive systems and policies in

order to support students even given the challenges presented by their positions by helping students to question systems and advocate for themselves.

5.2 Implications for Practice

This evaluation has practical implications for established mentoring programs and organizations that are responsible for creating, developing, and funding mentoring programs, particularly given the increased interest in critical mentoring and mentoring for students of color in urban contexts. Reviewing the benchmarking standards developed by the National Mentoring Partnership in their fourth edition of *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (MENTOR, 2015a) and *Guide to Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color* (MENTOR, 2015b), I agree with using a strengths-based approach for recruitment and screening (MENTOR, 2015a, MENTOR 2015b), however, this approach should also include asking specific questions during the interview process that involve direct application around a strengths-/asset-based approach. For example, in our recruitment and screening process, we require a three- to five-page essay with two options: “What are the most pressing challenges in urban education and how can we address them?” and “What are the main assets in urban schools/communities and how can we build on them?”, along with asking questions in the interview process such as “What does equity in education mean to you?” Though this essay may reduce the pool of candidates who apply for the position, it allows program coordinators to gain an idea of the mentor candidates’ attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, and thoughts around these topics. It is also important to ask these questions in order to provide applicants some understanding regarding the expectations of the mentor program.

The implications from this research also suggest that programs supporting predominately black students in urban contexts can utilize white allies and allies of non-Black backgrounds, who may serve in differing roles than their Black counterparts. This is especially true for working with cross-race mentor programs. Though research findings on the benefits of same-race versus cross-race matches are mixed (Sanchez, Colon, Feuer, Roundfield & Berardi, 2014), research does show that mentors need to be culturally competent in order to develop a beneficial cross-race mentorship (Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005); asking questions such as these can help. This evaluation shows that the scores of the initial Opportunity Gap Survey, especially for the white Fellows who participated in the Heinz Fellows Program, demonstrate that we were able to successfully recruit white mentors who entered with the appropriate mindset to support students of color in urban contexts.

Specifically reviewing the benchmarking standards developed by the National Mentoring Partnership in their fourth edition of *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (MENTOR, 2015a) and *Guide to Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color* (MENTOR, 2015b), the research shows that it is important to have developmental and instrumental approaches in training. In addition, regarding mentor training, my findings underscore the importance of having a diverse set of developmental and instrumental experiences in training including sessions with not only academics, faculty, and teachers, but also with non-traditional educators and community members, both in an academic space as well as in the community. For example, we included community advocates, neighborhood residents, and local support organizations in our training program to provide certain key elements that we know traditional educators typically cannot provide. This also models to school-based mentors that knowledge and education exists in many different and diverse sources. Fellows often commented on how important these educational experiences were

in shaping their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions. Not only did these experiences allow mentors to view the community in an asset-based way, but our mentors often gained insight into a social and historical context that only the community can provide.

This evaluation also has implications for the monitoring and support benchmarking standard developed by the National Mentoring Partnership in their fourth edition of *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (MENTOR, 2015a) and *Guide to Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color* (MENTOR, 2015b). This study provides a framework, namely the Opportunity Gap Framework, that gives mentors and program managers/directors tenets upon which to measure and assess the development of mentors' perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions in an asset-based, equity-framed manner. In addition, school-based mentor programs should provide mentors the opportunity for critical reflection and inquiry. Reflection journals provide a program manager/director with an opportunity to assess aspects of a mentor program that they are seeking to gain more insight into, in addition with providing the mentor with the important opportunity to reflect upon challenges, opportunities, and spaces for growth. Providing a space for conversation among mentors and colleagues for critical inquiry also allows for discussion around problem solving, navigating challenges, and critical discourse. Most importantly, roles and duties should be outlined and agreed upon between building leaders, program directors/managers, and mentors in order to avoid confusion or mission drift/creep.

5.3 Limitations/Implications for Future Research

The limitations around these findings are that the Opportunity Gap Survey has not been tested for validity or reliability, and that the survey is geared more towards teachers than mentors.

However, I believe that the five tenets it measures are applicable to school-based mentoring, in addition to possible questions added in the future that focus more on positionality, identity, and empathy, which were concepts frequently mentioned by the Fellows. In addition, some of the questions in the survey may have been misinterpreted or misread by mentors, so I believe the survey, if used for future school-based mentor programs, would need to be changed and tested for validity and reliability. There was also a small sample size used in this evaluation (N=15) along with the fact that most of the Fellows already showed strong alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework at the start of the program. There is no way to determine if similar results would be concluded from school-based mentors who initially did not show much alignment with the Opportunity Gap Framework.

This evaluation looked primarily at the perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of school-based mentors in an asset-based, equity-focused program using an Opportunity Gap Framework. I believe further research should examine teacher, administrator, and student feedback regarding the support of the mentors. Specifically, I believe that evaluating whether support by the Heinz Fellows leads to critical consciousness development in the Fellows as well as in students (Katsarou et al., 2010; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). In addition, I believe the data from the reflection journals and interviews can be evaluated further to analyze specific aspects of the program itself. Furthermore, the Fellows' data could be further disaggregated by race, gender, and/or school location to produce some deeper findings.

5.4 Demonstration of Practice

My demonstration of practice would be a presentation of these findings before the Pittsburgh Public School District, the Executive Board of The Heinz Endowments, and the Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania. The goal would be to share a best practices assessment of how mentoring for students in urban contexts should be conducted from recruitment, to screening, to training and monitoring/support. In addition, I would like to develop an asset-based, equity-focused, school-based opportunity gap mentoring handbook in conjunction with Dr. H. Richard Milner IV and Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan for organizations and school districts to use.

Finally, I would also like to have the findings of this evaluation and extensions from this research published in a journal such as *Urban Education* or *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*.

5.5 Conclusions

The evaluation of this program was critical because there is an abundance of research around student outcomes for school-based mentor programs, without much discussion around training, development, monitoring, and support, specifically for school-based mentors supporting students in urban contexts. Overall, the findings from this evaluation demonstrated a positive shift that the Fellows as a group exhibited in their perceived attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions towards aligning with an Opportunity Gap Framework based on the educational experiences, professional development opportunities and interactions with students and teachers that the Fellows experienced. Yet, the Fellows also realized that there was still more work and learning to

be done and that addressing inequities in education while using an asset-based, equity-framed mindset to provide support with an Opportunity Gap Framework is an ongoing challenge. Based on this research, this program has had a profound impact on the Fellows who participated in the first year. As one Fellow noted:

During this program, I feel I have done more self-reflection and interrogation than in any other program I have ever been a part of...I am incredibly happy to have this time to reflect and think critically about myself and who I am. I can tangibly feel the shift that's occurred in my perspective since entering the schools, and I feel I could use more support when it comes to actually putting those ideas and theories into use.

This program has also led participants to think about their own positionality and race as it relates to larger systemic and institutional inequalities in the world. It has empowered both white educators to move forward and continue doing the work:

As a white educator, this will be an ongoing process that doesn't stop when this program is over. I'll need to be diligent about interrogating my own biases and continuously seeking to learn from my students about their experience and how I can best serve them.

In addition, it has challenged Black educators to question some of their own biases and preconceived notions:

I had preconceived views on education, the biased system and what I perceived to be the "real problems" impacting students; particularly African Americans. In many instances, I admittedly early in my career approached mentorship from savior's mindset. In my mind, these kids were filled with deep rooted deficits that I felt it necessary to impart my awesomeness into their empty cups. The decolonization of my mind was a major

takeaway...the transformational shift within myself allows me to work, engage and form relationships from an asset-based mindset as opposed to a deficit-based mindset

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that a school-based mentor program such as this with an Opportunity Gap Framework can indeed have an instrumental impact in shifting the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions of educators from a diverse range of backgrounds, even for a program that only lasts for one year.

Appendix A Opportunity Gap Survey

Table 4 Opportunity Gap Survey

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|-------------------|-------|---------|----------|----------------------|
| 1. I believe that racism has ended. | | | | | |
| 2. I believe that I may offend my colleagues if I express my beliefs and reservation about race. | | | | | |
| 3. I will consider my students' race when making decisions in the classroom. | | | | | |
| 4. I will consider my own race when making decisions in the classroom. | | | | | |
| 5. I believe race plays a role in the educational experiences of my students. | | | | | |
| 6. I will treat all my students the same regardless of their cultural background. | | | | | |
| 7. I will teach students based on how I teach my own biological children. | | | | | |
| 8. I am not going to tolerate students joking around during class. If they misbehave, I am sending them to the office – period! | | | | | |
| 9. Students should adapt and assimilate into the culture of my classroom and accept the consequences if they do not. | | | | | |
| 10. I feel equipped to address cultural conflicts as they emerge in the classroom with my students. | | | | | |

Table 4 (continued)

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 11. All people are born with the same opportunities in the United States. | | | | | |
| 12. If students are hard-working and put forth effort then they will be successful in school. | | | | | |
| 13. If students do not succeed, it is because they are not working hard enough. | | | | | |
| 14. Some students just do not have the aptitude, ability, or skills for success in school | | | | | |
| 15. I have been successful in life due to my own merit. | | | | | |
| 16. I need to distance some of my students from the “horrors” of their home conditions. | | | | | |
| 17. Some students lack so much and their home environments make it difficult for me to teach them. | | | | | |
| 18. Students need educators who make up for what they lack because some students “bring so little” to school. | | | | | |
| 19. I believe that if I expect too much of many of my culturally diverse students then I am setting them up for failure. | | | | | |
| 20. I cannot expect much from some of my students because they do not have the skills to succeed on rigorous tasks. | | | | | |
| 21. If I know my subject matter well, I can get all my students interested in the subject regardless of the context. | | | | | |
| 22. The location of the school is inconsequential to my success with students. | | | | | |

Table 4 (continued)

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 23. It is necessary for me to rally the school community to help empower, energize, and motivate students inside the school and classroom. | | | | | |
| 24. It is necessary for me to develop skills to understand the historic and contemporary realities of the school communities where I teach. | | | | | |
| 25. Students can be successful in any classroom. | | | | | |

Appendix B Sample Reflection Journal Questions

- 1) Reflecting upon CUESEF, the readings, facilitations, etc. from the first 2 weeks of this program, discuss how you feel that your specific identity plays a role in working in urban schools. What have you learned in these first 2 weeks that may have changed what you originally thought prior to starting this program? How do you think students and others within the school will perceive your identity?
- 2) What aspect of training do you feel best prepared you for working in the schools? (You can refer to specific speakers, topics, theories, concepts, activities, etc.) Where do you feel that the gaps in training were that would have helped you better prepare for working in the schools thus far? What do you feel was missing or was not covered in enough detail?
- 3) What are some of the assets that you have noticed in the school site that you are working at? What are some of the challenges that you have come across in the school site that you are working at?
- 4) What theories, practical aspects, techniques, etc. of mentoring that we either have or have not discussed would you like to cover in more detail in our Professional Development sessions? What theories, practical aspects, techniques, etc. of teaching that we either have or have not discussed would you like to cover in more detail in our Professional Development sessions?
- 5) What have you learned about YOURSELF in supporting students? How can what you have learned influence, inform and assist the work that you are doing?
- 6) What challenges are teachers having at your school site and what could you be doing to assist them with those challenges?

Appendix C Heinz Fellows Interview Protocol

Good morning/afternoon. My name is _____ and I am a doctoral student evaluating the Heinz Fellows Program. Today I will be interviewing you about your experience as a Heinz Fellow. This interview should last for approximately 1 hour. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes. You can choose to not answer some of the questions or opt out of the interview at any time.

Do you consent to participating in this interview and to being recorded? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

- 1) How did you see institutionalized and systemic racism enacted within the school you were working at? Think of this also in context to some of the other schools that we visited
- 2) Were you able to embody a growth mindset and how? *If not, what were the barriers?*
- 3) What did you expect your field experience to look like? How did it meet your expectations? *If it didn't live up to your expectation, what do you wish it had looked like?*
- 4) How did your interaction with the cohort and staff both at the Center and in your school site shape your experience in this program?
- 5) Give a specific example where you were able to reflect upon readings, videos, presentations or some other part of this program and carry out the work of social justice in your classroom.
- 6) Give an example of how you were able to acknowledge and overcome challenges in the classroom in order to help students either academically and/or socioemotionally.
- 7) Discuss some of the assets that you witnessed in the community and in the school and describe how you were able to build upon these assets in order to improve outcomes for students and/or teachers.
- 8) Discuss what your expectations were of the PAR project prior to starting it and how you had to adapt based on different challenges.
- 9) Give an example of how you were able to problem solve an issue given the emphasis in school on punitive measures. (disciplinary practices, assessment/test scores and grades, etc.)
- 10) Discuss concepts and themes of the Opportunity Gap Survey including color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, deficit mindsets, low expectations and/or context neutral mindsets and how they exist and are perpetuated in your school site. Give an example of something you did to try to overcome these challenges.

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