

TEACHER TRANSFORMATION:  
TRANSCENDING HEGEMONIC ROOTS

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation study, I build from the research on transformative teaching (transformative for students), liberating theories (Liberating, Liberation and Liberating Theories) as well as literature about transformation, reflection and discourse to make the case that our historic and continuously inequitable results for students based on demographics (not the least which is racial identities) have less to do with gaining more knowledge and skill about of teaching and learning (the technology for how to equitably educate all our students exists) and less to do with the necessary tweaks in our system (redesign, restructuring, etc.). Rather, radical shift may lie in transformation. As a result of this literature review, I offer a conceptual model, which includes stages for interruptive experiences, making meaning and taking action.

Through this facilitated participatory interpretive study, I define and focus on the Transformed Teacher. This study suggests that radical shift will require teachers to engage in ongoing work in order to reach and sustain at a minimum threshold of personal transformation in order to effectively work in and simultaneously against the hegemonic design of public schools in service of our least reached students, thus transcending their arguably intended roles to help manifest social reproduction. The question for this study basically asked how have those teachers who have engaged in their own transformation come to do so given the reproductive and seductive systemic forces?

Based on the assumption that Transformed Teachers provide transformative experiences for traditionally least-reached students, this study first engaged “students-on-the-cusp” to reflect on and recommend teachers who have been transformative for them – and thus teachers who may have reached a minimum threshold of personal and professional transformation themselves. These teachers were then invited to participate

in a daylong reflective writing and working retreat; the results served as the primary data for this study. Conclusions suggest that Transformed Teachers need to continuously develop their awareness of our educational system, themselves and others; commit to rigorous inquiry, reflection and discourse - professionally AND personally; alone, in (racial) affinity, and across difference, benefit from relationships with mentors, and must share their own - and listen to others' diverse stories.

Results for this study could have implications for all levels of teacher development – from teacher education to hiring to ongoing teacher support and evaluation. Expanded, learning and implications may be transferable for creating parallel possibilities for our students themselves.

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## **Chapter 0: Discernment Statement**

*“Neither data nor theory alone are adequate to the task of social explanation.”*

(Jean Anyon, 2009 pg. i)

I am a product of public schools. I have an educational DNA that is constructed from the educational values, beliefs and expectations espoused and modeled by my family and culture (informed by their own educational experiences) and the educational messages and practices I actually experienced in my schools. I contend that it is impossible to consider how schools reproduce biases and inequities for our current youth without considering how the institution that is school has played out in our very own lives.

As a product of public schools, I both have been overtly a benefactor of the racism and sexism historically and systemically embedded within our educational system’s design, and simultaneously a target of its inherent, complex and regenerative classism and homophobia. My experiences growing up as a working poor, gay, Lebanese/ Italian student in white male skin has served to construct and instruct my perspective of the work in which I now find myself.

White and male, I heard explicit and implicit messages that conveyed expectations for me to succeed in school (e.g. “You’ll make a great doctor,” lawyer, etc.). Yet gay and closeted (and despite well-established statistical evidence that suggests at least one LBGT student can be assumed to be in any class of 30 students), I heard the consistent message in classrooms, cafeterias, schoolyards, and halls that school was not a safe place for people like me – and therefore, not a place for me. My “dual” identity gave

me the privilege of being in the room, unknowingly undercover, as those around me discussed their intentional hatred for and fear of a group of people that included me.

My parents wanted me to excel in school even though they struggled to find their own access to my formal education in a system that had not always served them. My mother earned her GED, and thanks to the GI Bill, my father attended night school for his Associates Degree – but never left his role as a factory worker.

I attended a college-prep high school that predominantly served wealthier students from the East Side of Providence, RI. The assumption and expectation was that my family, from the west side, would be the primary support for my journey to college. I was to be the first in my family to attend a four-year college right from high school.

After repeatedly trying to meet with my counselor to begin my college application process, I finally caught her in passing. She told me she did not have time for me; “Besides,” she reasoned, “your family cannot afford college.” That year, I had scored in the top 10-20% of standardized tests.

Finally, after years of hearing and rebelling against the message that school was not for me, I listened. I cut 80 days of school in my Senior year. No one seemed to know. No one checked on me. No one called my family. No one failed me. Invisible, ignored and de-humanized, I heard that my education did not matter; I learned that I did not matter.

My family’s message about the importance of education was consistent. Their messages about school were different, as they saw education coming from not only school, but also home. While they recognized that the two did not always align (school was for book knowledge and home was for life lessons), they did expect us to be respectful and obedient in both places.

As my education advanced and my social skills matured, assumptions about my background perpetuated. Simply by looking at my skin color and hearing me talk, those around tended to be quick to assume my history - including the assumption that I came from a family more affluent and formally educated than was true. It was less frequent that these assumptions were checked, and as a result, I once again found myself amidst people who discussed my life (welfare/ food stamps, working class values, multiple-language families, worthiness to have certain privileges such as recreation, transportation and food) without actually realizing I was in the room.

So much of our Educational DNA is determined by the skin we live in. In America, the skin we live in is defined first and foremost by race; it also is so much more. It has been my experience that unexamined, the skin I am in can be baggage weighing me down; examined, the skin I am in serves as a source of great pride and strength – of liberation.

*I am Gregory Peters.*

*I am the child of parents who prioritized service and respect and family itself, parents with the wisdom of humility, inquiry and critical consciousness.*

*I am of a family whose education reaches back to the lineage of our ancestors and culture, and who collectively defines and measures intelligence not solely through our brains, but also our hearts and passions and hands.*

*I am an American of proud Lebanese and Italian heritage.*

*I grew up on food stamps.*

*I am queer at a time when my queer students are still dying by their own and others' hands and influence – everywhere!*

*I am married. I have been married four times - to the same man.*

*And in the context of educating our least reached youth... I am still a White man.*

The skin I am in is so much more than the skin you see, and yet the skin you see is so much of who I am. Even in all my complexity, the institution that is public education automatically and inequitably still favors me as a white man. Furthermore, I purport, that regardless of my espoused and sincere values and beliefs, I always have the option to discount my less visible target status by embracing and taking advantage of my skin privilege, and absent intentionality, I ultimately will. Thus, I must commit to the continuous self-examination and consistent work of serving as an ally across difference.

Over the past 20 years, my work has been deepened by the stories of my students, colleagues, and families. Their experiences have influenced my decisions, results and reflections as an educator, leader and ally. I carried their stories as a school leader, in a school that became a model, recognized for effectively making progress to close the achievement gap – ultimately sending 98% of our predominantly graduates of color to college regardless of demographic predictors.

The stance from which I approach this research has evolved from the culmination of experiences – my own, my family's and those of the people with and for whom I work.

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

*“We have maintained historical commitment to the same paradigm that we had when public school education began in the United States, ascribing genius to a select few.”*

(Asa Hilliard, 1995, p. 200)

Our urban, public schools as a manifestation and representation of an operant theory and a history rooted in white supremacy and colonialism, are conclusively unsuccessful towards the more recently espoused goal to equitably educate all youth. Rather, they are quite effective at serving our larger, hegemonic, social structure. “The difficulty in initiating schooling for a democratic society flows from the strength of social reproduction in American schooling. Social reproduction as defined by McLaren (1994) is perpetuation of social relationships within the larger society. Another way to say this is that children are developed to replace their parents and/ or family members in the social and economic life of a society” (Eubanks et. al., 1997, p. 151). Current student results suggest that this intentionally reproductive design is so entrenched, so advanced and so effective, that anything less than interruption itself, perpetuates reproduction.

One could manipulate and empirically test... characteristics endogenous to education systems, and still fail to assess fully how or why schools work, do not work, fail or succeed. Instead, one needs to situate schools and districts, policies and procedures, institutional forms and processes in the larger social contexts in which they occur, in which they operate and are operated upon. (Anyon, 2009, p. 3)

Critical Social Theory establishes that we individually and collectively come with an historical and social context that cannot be ignored or de-contextualized when looking at and analyzing information before us. It is recognized that our larger social circumstance includes a legacy of colonialism, or a “practice of domination, domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another” (Kohn, 2006, para. 1). We cannot accurately consider who we are and how we came to be as a nation-society without taking into account the systemic exploitation that has occurred throughout our history.

Our historical foundations are so infused in our social evolution, they impact the very beliefs and values of each of us – including our teachers. These beliefs and values materialize in our educational decisions and design, actions and reactions and ultimately serve to predetermine the experiences and achievement of our students (Eubanks et. al. 1997; McQuillan, 2005; Delpit, 2003, George and Aronson, 2003). One need only look at the predictive value of demographics in any local or larger context to recognize that race, and to a lesser extent, class and language, matter in identifying who are the intended benefactors of public education.

Even teachers who intend to interrupt the reproductive results seen across our schools have been prepared by this system and therefore, one could argue that unexamined, every teacher is prone to reproduce that which she knows – that which has worked FOR her - and thus perpetuate the status quo, ultimately serving to sustain the results we seem to agree need to be interrupted. Yet, even with the dismal results surrounding us, there continue to be beacons of hope, models of teachers who – despite their sharing common historic roots and social grooming – have somehow transformed what they know, how they do, and who they are. Furthermore, they have transformed

their results with students – not regardless of social demographics, but specifically considering them.

*Who are these teachers? How did they get to be the practitioners they are? What do we know about them? What can we learn from them?*

With demographic data demonstrating that the cultural gap between our student populations and our teacher-force is widening at an unprecedented pace (The Center for Public Education, 2007), we need to evolve our definition of teaching to ensure effective engagement and results across cultural (i.e. racial, linguistic and experiential) differences. We have a long history of technological (curricular and pedagogical) reforms in the broadest sense (e.g. advisory, charter schools, culturally relevant teaching, project based learning); some have been more successful than others, but none has transformed our system and with it, our predictable student results. Perhaps it is time to look deeper than the teaching and look into the teacher herself.

Significant work exists about what makes our more rare and most successful educational practitioners tick (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 2003). Still, it is worth further study to explore not only the qualities of these teachers and the influential conditions surrounding them, but also what experiences or conditions served as catalysts for these teachers to transcend blind participation in a predestined and hegemonic role that would have led to more predictable student results – especially across race, class and language.

## Problem Statement

When we consider the specific demographics of race, class and language as the indicators for whom our schools serve and fail most, our often espoused and assumed societal values for schools to be equitable and transformative places actually seem to be insidiously part of a larger derailment effort towards the status quo. I suggest that the very DNA within our public education system's design has evolved through a White Supremacy operant theory and we see its impact in the results of our non-dominant culture students today and historically. Furthermore, despite massive allocation ("dumping") of resources, strategies and reform efforts to improve, our schools persist in reproducing these historically predictable and inequitable results for our youth.

*What is our work if we come to realize and accept that we actually possess all the knowledge and skills needed to educate each of our students excellently and equitably even though we are not doing so?*

I worked with a local school, which had all the conditions that many argue is needed in order to close the achievement gap. They had more money than they could spend (thanks to huge grants). They had a small number of students in the school (fewer than 200) and in their classes (as low as seven); they had an unimaginable teacher to student ration (4:1)! They had a fair amount of curricular autonomy with which they committed to design and deliver project-based learning for their students. They had political support from their superintendent. Not only did this school not progress in closing the racial achievement gap (as compared to other and similar schools without those conditions), but also they managed to be ranked in the bottom 5% of all schools in the state. This one experience certainly serves as only one data point for a widely

accepted premise that knowledge and skill alone provide no assurance success. It also supports Noth's assertion that, "many educational theories reveal that political will does not emerge solely because of particular political, social, and economic conditions, even if such conditions are necessary for political will to become realized in socially transformative actions" (2008, p. 45). North and my experiences leave me to question,

*How does one develop the personal, professional and political will – and courage – to step out of her predestined role of reproduction?*

Even with the importance I place on the need for teacher to have the beliefs and values for what is possible and necessary for each student to be educated excellently and equitably, I do not subscribe to the false dichotomy that it there is a prescriptive order to what must come first for effective teachers, the will or the professional skill and knowledge. This polar paradigm maintains something less than what is fully needed for our youth. To normalize the idea of what is needed "first" for teachers to improve results for our students, communicates an invisible acceptance that something comes later and therefore, can wait. Why, given the urgency of our current education situation, must we limit our notion of what is possible and necessary to "either-or" dynamics rather than accept and demand a "both-and...and" standard for walking into a classroom on day one?

Our least reached students require teachers who constantly work BOTH to maintain high expectations and belief that each student can and will succeed regardless of their social demographics AND to use well known and consistent practices for all students regardless of these demographics... AND to do whatever else it will take to provide them what they need and deserve from school. They deserve teachers who are committed both to evolve their knowledge, skill and humility as effective culturally

competent teachers, and to develop their will and courage to form and actualize social justice stances that translate to anti-racist actions and advocacy not only with, but also on behalf of, their students and all students in the face of our larger institutional and systemic design intended to impede the results of even our best teaching.

Educating our youth will take a commitment of the full multiplicity of all of who we are – our will, our knowledge, our skill, our emotions, even our spirit. Perhaps researchers create unique lexicon and encourage entry points to transformative teaching through false isolationism because the truth may be overwhelming. Yet treating each component of effective and transformative teaching separately has not worked en masse thus far. Perhaps it is time to recognize these efforts are part of a whole - and it is time to consider the whole teacher as a vehicle for transformative education.

### **Nature of the Study**

Guided by the larger Essential Question, “*Given the historic truths of public education within our larger social construct, what is truly necessary for public education to transform and equitably educate all its students, regardless of students’ social association?*” my personal and professional experiences have led to my focused, framing question for the research,

**How are teachers, as products of a hegemonic school system, transformed to transcend their reproductive role within the same system to that they can successfully educate our traditionally least reached youth?**

The extent to which our educational system and its educators serve a larger hegemonic system of oppression, this study investigates (and investigates with) those

who seem to have broken free of this machine and have defined a new reality for themselves and for their students. While I expected my research to help make meaning of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and values with that of the success for their students' across demographic characteristics, ultimately, I examined change at the teacher level to determine what has served as catalysts for specific teachers to shift internalized and historical roles and beliefs in order to create and nurture the will, skill and knowledge to expect and ensure excellence from all students – regardless of racial and social demographics. To that end, my goal was to develop new knowledge about what is necessary to transform our larger current reality so that our schools are designed for and our teachers ensure equitable education and become the vehicles to educational freedom that it is espoused to be.

### **The Transformed Teacher**

For the purpose of this study, I assume that transformation is continuous and offer the following as an initial definition for the Transformed Teacher who has reached a critical threshold within the transformation process.

*The Transformed Teachers is the educator who has transcended the prejudicial and oppressive beliefs, values and expectations - as well as the resulting practices - that seem to be instilled in the very DNA of our public education system and ultimately sustained through a highly effective, reproductive cycle implicating our educators as individuals who have successfully navigated and therefore benefitted from the system they are charged with interrupting.*

According to Mezirow (1991), "Experience strengthens our personal category systems by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be... That is, we construct a model of the world with our system of categories, come to expect certain

relationships and behaviors to occur, and then experience our categories, making imaginative projections to construe experience” (p. 146). He further asserts, “to make the crucial distinction between our own psychological reactions and external events requires the development of our capacity for self-consciousness” (p. 146).

Transformed Teachers, on paths towards constant self-consciousness, recognizes that while our “experience strengthens our personal category systems” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 146), dependent on the experiences, our reinforced “expectations about how things are supposed to be” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 1) can often, if not always assuredly stem from our larger, hegemonic societal construct rooted in white supremacist idealism. Furthermore, Transformed Teachers recognize how they, in the skin they are in, have both profited and lost as a result of this construct. Building from some, initial, character-changing experiences (willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously), Transformed Teachers intentionally (willingly AND consciously) inquire, examine, reflect, take action, assess and improve - not despite this reality, but explicitly considering it.

The Transformed Teacher connects her personal being to her professional life specifically within our schooling system. She recognizes that she has a prescribed role, as both product of and player for this system, to perpetuate and reproduce the larger construct of oppression and power for her own students (Kennedy, 1999; Sheets, 2009). With increased consciousness of her world and her place within it, the Transformed Teacher is aware that a deep shift in her very being is necessary. This shift must take place not only her curricula and pedagogies, but also in the beliefs, values and resulting expectations behind her decisions and actions about her students. Thus the Transformed Teacher begins to internalize a stance for equity and social justice, and a commitment to an even more intentional professional transformation in order to interrupt and transcend

her systemic destiny and to re-conceptualize and actuate her work as an agent and effective educator of social change and improvement.

The Transformed Teacher recognizes the importance of BOTH maintaining high expectations and belief that each student can and will succeed regardless of their social demographics AND using prescribed and well-known best practices for all students regardless of these demographics. Thus she commits BOTH to evolve her knowledge, skill and humility as a culturally competent and effective teacher, and to develop her will and courage to form and actualize a social justice stance that translates to anti-racist actions and advocacy not only with, but also on behalf of her students and all students in the face of a larger institutional and systemic design intended to impede the results of even her best teaching.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of a Transformed Teacher is measured less by the cultural competence infused through her knowledge and skills, or by the fierceness of her anti-racist stance in the name of equity and social justice, than it is evidenced by the results of her students, again, specifically the students who historically have been least served.

While the processes of transformation are neither linear nor prescriptive, this researcher posits that the Transformed Teachers recognizes that alone, her impact – both on the larger system, and on any single student of hers – is limited. With experience, she is capable of leading and supporting others – students, peers, communities – in their own conscious-raising processes to transcend from their predetermined destinies as public educators and students within our hegemonic society.

## Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, I distinguish the word transformative from transformed. Within the boundaries of these pages, transformative refers to a description of teachers or teaching that has a transformative impact on students (or others) while transformed describes a teacher who has reached a certain, minimum threshold of her or his own transformation (see definition for The Transformed Teacher above).

Beyond definitions, I take to this study a deeper set of assumptions - some which may seem obvious. First, public schools are failing. They are failing our youth, and ultimately they are failing our society. Public schools, however, are not necessarily failing their original design. Applied Research Center, (2001) references Thomas Jefferson proposing “a two-track educational system, with different tracks in his words for ‘the laboring and the learned.’ Scholarship would allow a very few of the laboring class to advance, Jefferson says, by ‘raking a few geniuses from the rubbish.’” (para. 2).

I believe that collectively, we have all the knowledge and skill we need to educate each of our students excellently and equitably. I assume that we are not successful because we do not fully utilize and integrate what we know into what we do. Ultimately, I assume that this limited use of effective strategies – especially with our most underserved students (based on social demographics, both real and perceived, relates to our deeper beliefs and values regarding who can and should have access to an effective and excellent education.

I trust students are aware of the beliefs, values and expectations teachers hold of them and this influences their own expectations, experiences, engagement and ultimately, academic success.

I assume that intellectual competence alone may not be enough for any individual to teach and thus am inclined to believe that our teachers must engage in a minimum

level of self-examination and personal transformation before taking responsibility for other people's children – especially children whose experiences are vastly different than their own.

Despite the damage caused by the hegemonic intentions and design of our school system, I believe that both young people and adults can heal from the hurtful experiences within this brilliantly oppressive system. Ultimately, I believe that this healing can both create opportunity for us to radically change how we do what we do WITH students, and serve as a transformative catalyst for us to develop the will and courage to do what is necessary FOR our students. I also assume one way to create these healing opportunities is to initiate and sustain transformational learning communities that are focused on alliance building across difference.

### **In Summary**

As the experience gap between our educators and our least reached students continue to widen, we will increasingly witness the equity gap in access and achievement and thus a perpetuated cycle of reproduction. Interrupting this cycle requires educators to be prepared and equipped to transform their very being through self examination, critical consciousness, and explicit work to develop alliances across difference – ultimately represented by the greatest cultural differences between themselves and their students. Different than what traditionally has been accepted as the work of schools and teachers, true transformation will require courageous leadership from those who have begun the work themselves, thus, we must seek out what is working for our youth at a time when it is easier to be mired in what is not working. By starting with those who have engaged in a transformative process already, I hope this study will inform the professional

preparation and expectations of our teacher force – from training programs to ongoing professional development.

Again, some progress already has been made. After reviewing relevant literature – from liberating theories to adult transformation frameworks, I engaged with school leaders and with students themselves – specifically students who will be considered “on the cusp” (see chapter 4). *Who do they believe are the Transformed Teachers? What do they consider the characteristics of such a teacher? What difference does it make?* Through this conversation, they will help identify a pool of Transformed Teachers who, if they meet specific student achievement criteria will be invited to participate in a collaborative written and oral exchange themselves. *How do these teachers characterize themselves? How did they get to where they are in their work? What do they believe it will take for others to transform themselves?* Finally, from the records of this work, I will make meaning and synthesize lessons learned so that educators and teacher leaders will be able to engage in their own efforts for personal and professional transformation – and support others to do the same.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

*“The goal is transformative learning through a reconstruction of social-political-historical knowledge, demonstrated through language and action on the part of the learner.”*

(Judith Reed & Deborah J. Black, 2006, p. 34)

### **Transformative Teaching**

Much work has been done to identify how to best educate the students we continue educate least well. Educational leaders such as Darling-Hammond (1995), Delpit (2003), Asa Hilliard (2003), Kohl (2003), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) and Noguera (2003) have provided research, reflection, conceptual frameworks and models as well as bluntly direct instructions for teachers.

Still, even amongst giants we find in the rhetoric the temptation to perpetuate the false dichotomy that one perspective takes priority to better serve students; furthermore, conveying one perspective is right also perpetuates the potential dismissal of other perspectives as wrong. With less than deep exploration, some may argue that leaders such as Kohl or Delpit takes the “student expectations first” stance; consider the three steps that Delpit (2003) suggests teachers need to take in order to educate all children: (a) “believe in the children,” (b) “fight foolishness” or “fight stupidity,” and (c) “learn who our children are and the legacies they bring” (pp. 16-18).

Similarly, some can argue that leaders such as Hilliard or Darling-Hammond hold the stance at the other end of the spectrum, emphasizing rigorous practice. Darling-Hammond explicitly aligned transformative teaching to the standards of teacher practice embedded in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards assessments (Darling-Hammond, 1995. pp.18-19).

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

Yet with deeper interrogation, it is easy to identify more commonalities than differences – and that the lessons learned thus far are less about “either-or” options for how to educate our youth and more about “both-and” – teachers need to BOTH believe in each of their students AND provide the best and most rigorous teaching and curricula.

When Delpit describes the vision of success, she references a teacher in Oakland who, amongst other practices, “provides a rigorous curriculum” (Delpit, 2003, p. 20).

Darling-Hammond often makes clear the connection that rigorous work on behalf of teachers requires rigorous expectations of all her students. Unpacking her recommendations, she posits that National Board certified teachers “are dedicated to making knowledge accessible to all students” and “treat students equitably, recognizing individual differences. They adjust their practice, as appropriate, based on observation and knowledge of their students’ interests, abilities, skills, knowledge, family circumstances, and peer relationships” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 18).

With a conceptual framework that helps us to understand our societal reality as a whole (defined by the relationship between its parts) (Albert et al. 1986), Liberating Theory can assist us – and therefore is used to consider social transformation from the perspective of the whole – be it person, community or system.

*"The greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves..."*

- Paulo Freire (2009, p. 44)

## **Liberating Theories**

There exists significant theoretical work in the area of liberation in relation to society, community and individual. The areas of Liberating, Liberation and Liberating Theories share enough commonalities and overlap that for the purpose of this study, unless referencing explicit theory or citing exact quotes, I will refer to this larger, culminating body of work as Liberating Theories.

Rooted in Emancipatory Theory, Liberating Theory offers a conceptual framework from which to better understand the relationship between our history, current reality and potential solutions for the constructs of inequity embedded in our society that take the form of domination, subjugation, and oppression. (Freire, 2009; Wood, 2002). It posits that through liberation, the oppressed can transform their automated responses to, overcome the impact of, and alter the outcomes intended from societal injustices (Baines, 2010; Freire, 2009; Leek, 1987; Nida, 2010).

While it offers a framework for understanding and for creating diverse strategies, Liberating Theory provides neither strategies nor solutions in and of themselves (Leek, 1987; Nida, 2010).

Related to emancipatory fields of study, including Feminist Theory, Liberating Theory is unique in its effort to explain society and social transformation through complimentary holism (Albert et al. 1986) in which the whole of our context – our reality – is formed by the total of and the relationship between the parts. (Albert et al. 1986; Baines, 2010; Freire, 2009; Leek, 1987).

“Yet, if nature is an unbroken whole with parts we can only examine in light of how they mutually interpenetrate and define one another, what does it mean to discuss a "system" separate from the rest of nature?” (Albert et al. 1986, p. 16).

In the case of Liberating Theory, these parts are loosely contained by the **Social Spheres**, *community, economic, kinship, and political* which relate to each other, co-define each other and work reflexively with each other in the larger, organic social totality (Albert et al. 1986; Nida, 2010). Nida (2010) cautions, “These spheres are abstractive conceptual tools that allow a certain perspective to be gained, and should be conceptualized ‘fuzzily’ rather than ‘precise cleavages between alternate states’... and so their use must be accompanied by flexibility and critique” (p. 7).

- **Community:** this sphere is where communities, which Albert et al. (1986) define as “groups of people who share a common sense of historical identity or heritage” (p. 22), develop and define those aspects of being that create the culture of that community - art/dance/music, food, language, music, religion, rituals and the relations within and across communities (Albert et al., 1986).

- **Economic (Material Realities):** while this sphere “involves the production, consumption, and allocation of material objects” (Albert et al., 1986, p. 46), also in this sphere are economic related activities, not the least of which includes labor and labor relations; these activities also have an impact on people.

- **Kinship:** in simple terms, this sphere represents ones gender and gender related

experiences and interactions. Kinship focuses on “the human life cycle and interpersonal relations,” its “activity revolves around sexuality, procreation, child rearing, socialization, maturation, and aging” (Albert et al. 1986, p. 32). Liberating Theory recognizes the complexity of this sphere, including socially-normed definitions of gender roles including how their socialization in our young.

- **Political:** this sphere is about power... or the lack thereof. The political sphere is where social structures, ideology, values and morays, laws and regulations, and (i.e. political, military, justice and other public systems and services) are established and prioritized (Albert et al., 1986). Obviously this happens in different ways within different contexts, and as such, related hierarchies can look as different.

It seems obvious that these spheres can overlap, as well as the fact that the overlap, their relationship and their impact will be different for different people and different groups of people depending on the varying and diverse experiences – including the impact of our diverse historical contexts (Albert et al., 1986; Baines, 2010; Freire, 2009; Leek, 1987). Furthermore, “within these social spheres, many different modes exist through which coercive or oppressive social relations are expressed – race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and other socially constructed differentiations. All of these modes crosscut social relations in different ways, and all are parts of a social whole.” (Nida, 2010, p. 8).

*“While no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others.”* - Paulo Freire (2009, p. 66)

Inherent in Liberating Theory is the premise that liberation will take collaboration; “collaboration is fundamental for both the theoretical and methodological

elements of emancipatory research” (Nida, 2010, p. 8). Much in the same way that the different spheres and modes of domination “can only be understood in relation to the other” (Nida, 2010, p. 9) in a manner that almost requires a “holistic interweaving of oppressions” (Albert et al. 1986, p. 18), the solution to counter societal hegemony will require not only individual work and transformation, but also commitment to work for transformation and liberation as we consider the impact of our unique and collective experiences as parts of the whole. (Albert et al. 1986; Baines, 2010; Freire, 2009; Collins 1991, Leek, 1987; Nida, 2010). In this way, one could make the case that Liberating Theory is related – if not situated in the roots of many of our current professional development frameworks that emphasize empowered teacher voice and teacher collaboration, which has been demonstrated to make a difference in teacher development and efficacy (Curry, M., 2008; Darling-Hammond; Eubanks et al, 1997; Little, J. W., Gearhart, M., Curry, M., & Kafka, J., 2003; McDonald, et. al., 2007; Guerra and Nelson, 2008).

If this is accepted, then the connection between Liberating Theory and student voice naturally follows – especially when empowering and giving volume to the voices of our least reached (urban poor, black and brown) students. “Students from all academic backgrounds can serve as ‘expert witnesses’ regarding effective schooling... their perceptions were strikingly similar to those expressed by the recognized experts.” (DeFur and Korinek. 2010. p. 19). Furthermore, “student voice activities can create meaningful experiences for youth that help to meet fundamental developmental needs - especially for students who otherwise do not find meaning in their school experiences” (Mitra, 2004, p. 651).

*“It is human consciousness that makes possible purposeful transformations of the*

*institutional boundary through human activity*” – Robin Hahnel (2002, p. 13).

Liberating Theory does not offer solutions to our social ills. So while there is much it offers in helping understand them, one is still left with the question of how to address what we may now understand a little better? As with all emancipatory theories, Liberating Theory emphasizes the importance of human agency. “Human agency is the primary driver of historical process, and this agency involves the consciousness, personality, feelings, skills, knowledge, social position, creativity, experience, needs, material resources, desires, values, ideas, etc., that a person possesses at any given time... Although people are centrally placed in Liberating Theory, they are not completely uninhibited in their agency and self-creation. Agency is influenced, structured, constrained or enabled by social and material constructs” (Nida, 2010, p. 7). While not always thought of in this manner, in the context and goal of liberation, we must consider how human agency can be reflexive and driven by who the collective of our history and experience before us has created (Albert *et al.* 1986; Baines, 2010; Freire, 2009; Leek, 1987; Nida, 2010).

Another critical concept of Liberating Theory is that of the dialectic. Nida (2010) states, “the real dialectic takes place between humans and our existential circumstances; the spark of the dialectic is our assertion of our being in the world. With every thought, breath, action or thing that we create, we bring something wholly new (yet historically situated) into the world while at the same time negating what was before. The primary agent in this humanist conception of the dialectic is the human being, who is at the same time both Spirit and Body, subject and object, in an inextricable way” (p.6). While this description is somewhat poetic, it supports the notion that exploratory and recursive discourse must be, if not part of the solutions, then at least a means to them.

Sherover-Marcuse' Liberation Theory: A Working Framework (Appendix A), asserts that, "liberation is possible. It is possible to recover the buried memories of our socialization, to share our stories and heal the hurts imposed by the conditioning, to act in the present in a humane and caring manner, to rebuild our human connections and to change our world" (2000, p. 3). In other words, the discourse of those impacted by oppression can together share and heal from their own and others experiences and in doing so deconstruct their an imposed reality and in turn reconstruct one of liberation.

What does such transformative healing look like – and how does it vary based on how one's experiences and historical forces have shaped who they are? How can we create such transformative healing experiences for teachers who arguably, have a critical role in perpetuating and accelerating the reproductive cycle of oppression for and within our society's youth?

In *The Power of Protocols*, (McDonald, et. al., 2007), Camilla Greene reflects on what is possible with focused and purposeful discourse amongst her peers,

I am an African American woman and educator with many years experience teaching English in urban high schools, and also working with other educators in urban areas. More often than not I use articles by Gloria Ladson-Billings or Lisa Delpit and do text-based discussions such as the Final Word. Sometimes mainstream, White educators are not used to seeing the words White and Black referenced in an article and are angry that we are even having a conversation about race, class, and gender. On the other hand, if the group is a diverse group, then the article must be passionate, relevant, and deep around the issue of equity. Together, educators must be willing to be transformed so that we can empower students. Together, we must form alliances that will help us move from awareness to understanding to taking action in our classrooms. Using provocative

texts and a variety of protocols is one way to hold ourselves accountable to each other and accountable for the success of our students (pp. viii-ix).

Even with this powerful witness, I am left to wonder, *what about those angry white* educators? As our schools' demographics continue to evidence a widening cultural gap between our predominantly white and female teachers, what is needed for their transformation?

We are not practiced in doing such work and in fact are practiced in using our time and space to maintain the status quo. "The current dominant discourse in schools (how people talk about, think about and plan the work of schools and the questions that get asked regarding reform or change) is a hegemonic cultural discourse." (Eubanks et al, 1997, p. 661). Still, some (Singleton, Delpit, etc.) are doing fine work. In particular, Singleton and Linton (2005) seem to take the idea of transformative discourse and to a new level of consideration, offering educators agreements, conditions and a compass for engaging in "Courageous Conversations About Race." In particular and if taken seriously, the suggested agreements, "1. Stay Engaged. 2. Experience Discomfort. 3. Speak Your Truth. 4. Expect and Accept Non-Closure" (p. 17) can encourage those white colleagues of Ms. Greene to stay and engage in the next level of discourse needed for continued improvement – and potentially develop the will "*to be transformed so that we can empower students*" who in turn will be able to do the same and thus begin an interruption to the cycle.

It has been suggested that creating the space for true transformative discourse requires at least a readiness if not a conscious willingness to transform (Weissglass, 1990; Eubanks, et. al. 1997; Guerra and Nelson, 2008). In other words, one must be willing to do one's own "work" – whether it be professional (improving her knowledge, skill, cultural competence, etc.) or personal (self-examining and reflecting on her beliefs,

values and expectations, engaging in cross-difference relationships, etc.). Another way to think about this is to suggest that teachers must engage in their own transformation in order to be transformative for those around them.

*What does it take to truly transform what, how and who we are?*

### **Transformation, Reflection and Discourse**

Transformation Theorist Mezirow (1997) defines transformational learning as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (p. 5). Mezirow goes on to offer a framework of transformation that consists of ten stages or “phases of meaning”:

Jack Mezirow’s Phases of Meaning: Becoming Clarified toward Transformation

1. A disorienting dilemma or situation that does not fit neatly with one’s preconceptions;
2. Self-examination with emotional reaction/ feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
3. A critical assessment of current assumptions;
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared by others;
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;
6. Planning a course of action;
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans;
8. Provisional and intentional trying on of new roles;
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, (and)
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (2000, p. 22).

These phases, while progressive, can be more cyclical than linear; they take place gradually over time or can occur suddenly based on one's experiences. "Research supports aspects of his 10-step process as well as his claims that the process is recursive and that people's perspective transformations are lifelong" (Baumgartner, et al., 2003, p. 27).

Understanding these phases or stages provides a strong framework to understand one's transformational process when transformation happens; it does not, however, provide understanding of what conditions lead one into and through these phases of meaning. In other words, finding oneself in any of these phases is no assurance of graduation to the next phase. The work of Schön (1983) supports Mezirow's own assertions that that critical to this each of these steps and to transformation as a whole is the act of critical reflection and reflective discourse.

Ultimately, our experiences serve as the roots of our mental models and assumptions about our world. When our mental model is challenged by contradictory experiences, our natural tendency is to deny or refute the reality of these experiences and thus seek to reinforce the beliefs we already have. (Mezirow, 1997) "Dialogue is thought to facilitate transformative experiences where one moves from idiosyncratic or parochial responses and interpretations to more socially conscious and aware ones, that is, responses and interpretations that go beyond one's original frames of reference" (Sinha, 2010, p. 459).

Further support comes from Baumgartner et al. (2003) who assert that learning that leads to transformation requires us to communicate learning beyond the words of talk and ensure we are learning what people mean. This cycle of critical reflection and discourse - communicative learning "involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking

action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it. This understanding of the nature of significant adult learning provides the educators with a rationale for selecting appropriate educational practices and actively resisting social and cultural forces that distort and delimit adult learning" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). Even though it is implied that liberation and transformation will have as one of its results a change in individual schema including the awareness, acceptance and appreciation of diverse cultures (Freire, 2000), the work reviewed often referenced the power of discourse without naming explicitly the role of discourse across difference, and in particular, discourse across race. Because of the role of race in our public schools' equity and achievement gaps, the variable of race will need to be more pronounced.

Creating the conditions for personal, professional and sustained transformation will require transformative leadership. "Transformative educational leadership involves one's engaging in self reflection, systematically analyzing schools, and then confronting inequities regarding race, class, gender, language, ability, and/or sexual orientation. Upon doing so, one works toward the social transformation of schooling." (Cooper, 2009, p. 696). Julian Weissglass references the importance of leaders taking responsibility for what matters most to them (1990); given this definition, I do neither automatically equate the concept of leadership with specific positionality, nor do I limit it to that which matters most to the leader. I suggest that our educational leaders are those who are willing and able to take responsibility for that which matters most – not just to the leader, but to her community. Leadership is necessary from all our educators so they may take responsibility first and foremost for their own behaviors and practices as well as for the results for their students. Building from what is known of transformative learning, Weissglass (1990) suggests particular leadership knowledge, skills and strategies, not the

least of which includes being steeped in reflective practices not only to surface and check one's own assumptions, but also those embedded within the system.

Even transformative leaders must consider whom they are leading before acting (sometimes). It has been my experience that adult learners often want to believe - or be made to feel as a sign of respect - they already know what is being taught to them – in order to learn it. The concept of self-directed learning or independent learning is important in considering the conditions necessary for supporting learners, especially adult learners. "This approach is based on the combined beliefs (1) that adults are inherently self-directing, (2) that the best way to learn autonomous behavior is to behave autonomously, and (3) that the ability to learn independently in one situation or context is generalizable to an ability to do so in a different setting." (Candy, 1991, p. 339.) While it is important to note that self-directed learning may need to be a pedagogical strategy for fostering transformational learning, it is equally important to remember that learning still remains a social process and even the independent learner will, at times, need instruction, support and modeling become aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions and progress towards transformational learning.

## **Conceptual Framework**

While Critical Social Theory (and to an extent Critical Race Theory) helps to make meaning of the current reality of our educational system, I built from the work of Transformational Learning and Liberating Theories to develop a framework to make meaning of the data I collect and analyze.

The quality of human capital is integral to the success of public education. As products of a system that is based on and designed to reproduce white, dominant culture, our predominantly white teacher force (but not solely its white teachers) are benefactors.

If successful in our espoused desired transform public education and reach equitable results for all students, the very educators leading the way almost certainly will no longer be assured the dominant place in society that they have internalized as theirs. If we accept that the system our most committed educators are seeking to transform, by design has served and continues to serve them and their offspring, then we should also accept that intentional transformation (interruption, deconstruction, and reconstruction) will be needed for our educators beliefs and values.

*What work beyond the technical aspects of teaching must we commit to doing? What personal transformation is needed for our educators to look in the mirror, assess their own beliefs and sustain through the difficult challenge of transforming their very cores (not just their practice) while also continuing to see limited results in the face of our larger contextual reality?*

The work of teachers has expanded. Educators must be on a continuous journey of self-examination and transformation – not only for improved knowledge and skill, but also in our very stances and related actions and reactions. As I consider my own journey, I have found the work around Critical Social Theory (CST) (Leonardo, 2004) to be of particular importance and influence. I consider the importance of each person to self-assess, reflect on and tell her or his own stories – as educators, students/ learners, and as human beings. It is through this process – the telling – as well as – the listening as others tell, that I believe educators will be able to locate themselves honestly within our larger schooling system, practice the role of collaborating within affinity and as allies across difference towards the ultimate goal of transforming their very being as educators who

ultimately are allies for their students towards their students' success within our educational system.

*"Such personal histories become instances of social patterns, not determined by them but certainly inscribed by them."* – Zues Leonardo (2004, p. 13).

One implication to consider is that if our stances are so deeply informed by our individual histories and current realities, then to transform our cores, we must move beyond the cognitive work that is the assumed work of education, into the affective and emotional domains that historically have been avoided and discouraged in educational realms. “Reform programs that address only the cognitive and behavioral aspects of educators' professional lives neglect an important part of their humanness and fall short of fully attending to the empowerment of teachers. By ignoring the influence of feelings on thought and action, such programs promote a view of school as a factory, whose purpose is to install knowledge into students' minds.” (Weissglass, 1990, p. 351)

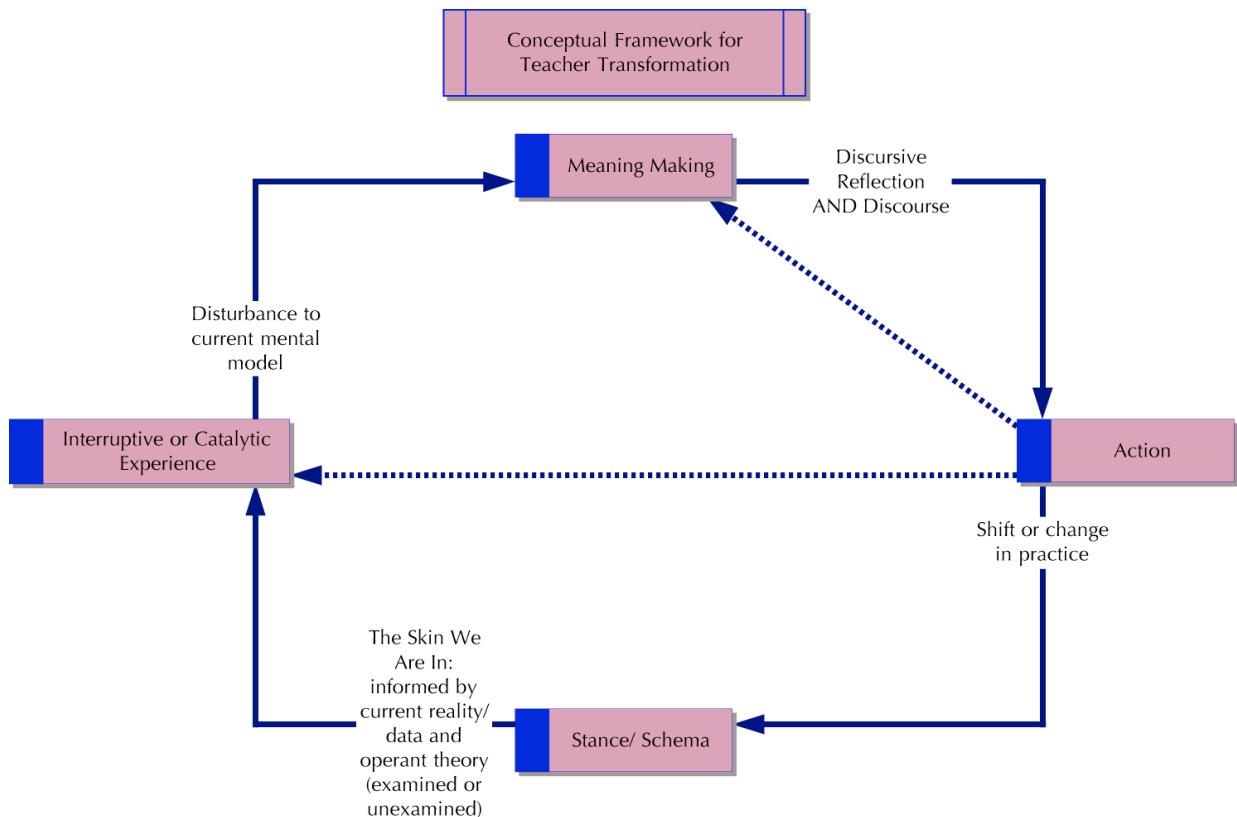
Continued study of CST will assist me to make meaning of our current situation with “an explicit analysis toward social justice, which distinguishes it from typical mainstream theory... to include various types of scholarship that critique domination and subordination, promote emancipatory interests, and combined social and cultural analysis with interpretation, critique, and social explanation.” (Anyon, 2009, p. 2). From this meaning, I used Transformational Learning and Liberating Theories to define a framework as well as my own stance and vision for interruption and deconstruction (the notion of mere “restructuring” conjures for me the image of rearranging chairs on the titanic or, more accurately, completing this task, using “the master's tools” to “dismantle the Master's House” (Lourdes, 1984, p. 13).

Even with the nature and scope of this study limited, Mezirow's ten phases of meaning (see p. 37) and Sherover-Marcuse' framework informed a conceptual framework to help make meaning of and explain what may be a path for Teacher Transformation. In simplest terms, the framework, supported by Mezirow's and Sherover-Marcuse's works, hypothesizes that educators:

1. Start with a stance that is informed by "the skin they are in" (the total of their own experiences and positionality in society.) Their experiences are often influenced by operant theories including that of white-supremacy and thus often reproductive until these stances are interrupted.
2. For some, their stances can be and are interrupted by an experience or series of experiences that contradict with or even blow up their current mental models. The impact of these interruptive experiences can be exacerbated and accelerated by an irrefutable breakdown of the logic (cognitive) behind their mental model or a deep emotional reaction to a conflict within or as a result of their very values and beliefs (affective). While this disturbance may lead the practitioner to a protective and defensive place (i.e. defense, denial, retreat), it also can serve as a catalytic experience for reflection and meaning making.
3. Given the right conditions, those who have had their mental models and stances interrupted can move to a meaning making stage in which personal reflection and discursive discourse with others who share similar AND different perspectives can help to reshape original mental models. These new mental models lead to slightly or radically different actions.
4. As those involved in this transformative cycle explore, experiment and "try on" new actions, the results of these actions serve either to reinforce shifts in mental models and thus become additional experiences that then transform their very

stances – or, as this work of transformation is never complete, may lead to additional disruptions or further reflection and discourse.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Teacher Transformation



This model and therefore both Mezirow's and Sherover-Marcuse's works also informed the curriculum for the teacher-participant's reflective writing and working retreat – and naturally were in mind when defining potential coding categories for the data collected. Specifically, Sherover-Marcuse's Framework informed specific content while Mezirow's phases were used as metrics for self-assessment of those identified as

Transformed Teachers to locate themselves. Ultimately, this simpler model helped me – but did not limit me to identify commonalities and differences in teacher-participant experiences.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

*"To improve student achievement, it makes sense to go straight to the source— students. Students can not only share opinions about their classroom experiences, but also play a significant role in school improvement efforts. OTE."*

(Dana Mitra, 2008, p. 20)

I conducted a facilitated participatory interpretive study in which I first engaged with students to share their perspectives and descriptions of transformative learning experiences they have had, their thinking about the characteristics of teachers who have been transformative for them, and thus potentially of the Transformed Teacher (based on the supposition that Transformed Teachers at least provide transformative experiences for their students).

Then, based on recommendations from these focus group students as well as recommendations from their principals, I employed action research methods to invite and engage with teachers who were identified as transformative. Within the Reflective Writing and Working Retreat Agenda (see Appendix B), the teacher-participants developed oral and written narratives to examine and reflect on their experiences as they related to their own transformations from what I have argued are predetermined, hegemonic roles as public educators, to that of the transformative teachers they demonstrated themselves to be and potentially to Transformed Teachers who had reached a more substantial threshold of both professional and cultural competence as well as a courageous social justice stance. These same teacher-participants also began to consider

collectively what they think may lead other teachers to similar transformational experiences, and ultimately, equitable and excellent student results.

## **Introduction**

There already exists extensive knowledge about what transformative teaching practices are required to reach our most underserved and disenfranchised students (i.e. black, brown, immigrant and poor students). Collectively, researchers such as Darling-Hammond (1995), Delpit (2003), Hernández Sheets (2005), Ladson-Billings (1994), Lee (1998), Poplin et.al. (2011), and Tomlinson (1998) have described AND prescribed what classrooms and teacher actions need to look like in order to reach, engage and accelerate the learning of these students. Essential as this knowledge is, current results and realities illustrate that such descriptions and prescriptions, alone, do not assure us the widespread, deep and sustained transformation that is needed (Singleton, G., Linton, C., 2005). As Eubanks, Parish and Smith posit, “there is no lack of well-known and effective solutions. If we have effective solutions and if we know, as some suggest, effective organizational change processes, why is it so difficult to produce substantial and lasting change in schools?” (1997, p. 662).

Even as we seek interruptive and deconstructive, systemic change, there are individual teacher-practitioners, leaders - and on more rare occasion - school communities, that demonstrate a level of sustained transformative practice. The commitment to know, do and be differently... intentionally, demonstrates a drastic shift not only in knowledge and skill, but also in the beliefs and values needed to educate as we espouse. The success of our least reached students requires us to continuously study with and learn from these individuals and systems.

With the ultimate intention to explore how teachers are transformed and what we can learn from Transformed Teachers beyond what good practice looks like, I began by listening to the voices of those for whom these teachers matter most – their students. With a national *pushout rate* nearing 50% (Zenkov, 2009), we are losing far too many students to consider that the reasons for this system failure lie in extreme social conditions for our students; thus, I focused my efforts on students identified as “on the cusp”. To identify these students, I started by requesting recommendations of such students from the school principal using the term “students on the cusp” only. The principal and I discussed her response before I offered my own definition of the term (the student who has been to some extent engaged at school and who as easily could pass and progress as s/he could fail and drop out). Based on this discussion, the principal had the opportunity to alter her recommendations.

As it becomes more researched and accepted that student voice can (and should) play an important role in school reform (Mitra, 2004, 2008), DeFur and Korinek specifically contend “that students from all academic backgrounds can serve as ‘expert witnesses’ regarding effective schooling” (2010, para. 2). I hypothesize that considering the traditionally unheard, non-traditional voices within this group would tell us much more than many of us might expect – and some of us might want.

Building from my literature review, I designed and conducted two student focus groups in order to increase my sample size. Each focus group took place at Success Academy, a school that is both within the network of SF-CESS (San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools) and the one where I served as co-principal (a role I played since leaving as the full-time principal six years ago). Based on recommendations from the school’s then full-time principal, these “on the cusp” students met with me to reflect on, explore and describe transformative learning experiences and the teachers who create

them; they considered these teachers in the context of characteristics identified in the working definition of a Transformed Teacher and then made recommendations for teachers they believe actually may be transformed.

While I remained open to students from these focus groups informing, evolving or even changing the initial definition of a Transformed Teacher, I gathered data based on student experiences about what transformative teaching looks like to them and how it is experienced by them so that they may best identify teachers who they consider to be transformative for them. From this process and the recommendations from the principal and students, I identified teachers to invite to a one-day reflective writing and working retreat in June 2011, during which they engaged in collaborative study, work, and reflection.

Prior to and during the retreat, I engaged this group in discourse and work to share and record reactions to being nominated as a transformative teacher and being considered a potential Transformed Teacher, reflections about what in their lives have influenced or led to their unique transformation and transcendence from the hegemonic pathway prescribed for public educators, and finally, their suggestions for how best to support other teachers through their own transformation in service of our least served students. The results of this retreat (as well as the focus groups) were recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis.

## **Setting**

I centered my study at Success Academy specifically because it is part of the network of schools served by the organization for which I serve as the Founder and Executive Director, the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools (SF-CESS). SF-CESS is committed to “interrupt and transform current and systemic educational

inequities to ensure all students have access to personalized, equitable<sup>1</sup> and high performing schools that believe and demonstrate each student can, should and will succeed” (2008, para. 1). Besides committing to the work established in this mission, our schools are guided by the National Coalition of Essential Schools’ 10 Common Principles, which, “based on decades of research and practice, are a guiding philosophy rather than a replicable model for schools” (Coalition of Essential Schools, 2000, para. 1).

Success Academy is the first startup charter high school in California. Prior to founding SF-CESS, I served as its principal for 7 years, and until June of 2011, served as its Co-Principal (supporting its leadership one day per week). During my tenure as Principal, we achieved a number of accolades for the equity-centered work to which we were committed and which served as the basis for SF-CESS, my own leadership and many of the values and assumptions taken to this very research.

- In 1997, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s early high school reform evaluation report highlighted Success Academy as “existence proof for effective high schools” (Howard, D. and Newsome, J., 2005, p. 4).
- Success Academy was designated one of twenty national Mentor Schools for the National Coalition of Essential Schools in 2005.
- Success Academy was highly commended by an independent Consent Decree Monitor, specifically referencing how its “equity focus by highly motivated educators has led to outstanding gains for a student population that is diverse racially/ethnically as well as on the basis of socioeconomic status, led the District

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<sup>1</sup> SF-CESS defines Educational Equity as the practice of holding a stance, developing policies and processes, using a set of tools, and taking actions and making decisions... towards the explicit and intended goal of “equal and excellent results” for students regardless of external or internal, social or cultural contexts.

by graduating every one of its students ‘UC’ eligible” in 2004”. (Biegel, 2005, p. 7).

- Success Academy consistently graduated more than 90% of its seniors to two and four-year colleges and universities each year.

Since my tenure as principal ended in 2005, Success Academy, whose program was based in and tied to community needs and partnerships, had to move its very location three times in three years to different communities. The school experienced an intense disruption to its own community after each move (one of which took place in the middle of the academic year), ultimately with a negative impact on the program’s consistency and sustainability. While the effects were evident, from a high level of staff turnover to programmatic changes, none were so obvious as the immediately dramatic changes and reductions in student and family partnerships – and eventually a sharp and steady decline in student achievement. As of this study, Success Academy was amongst the lowest performing schools – when measured by standardized tests. Furthermore, even though their focus on personalization continues to support traditionally underserved students, their greater impact has been compromised as their rate of graduating seniors to two and four-year colleges has dropped below 90% over the past few years for the first time in its history. Even with its declined status, Success Academy continues to serve African American students better than most other San Francisco High schools using these same measures.

## **Participants**

I met with Success Academy’s principal in her office in order to obtain not only her recommendations for students but also for teachers she considers transformative and potentially transformed.

The student focus groups took place at the school. The first one took place in the students' favorite classroom (a history class) and the second took place in the Principal's office after students stated that they would feel comfortable meeting there. I scheduled focus groups to begin 15 minutes after school ended and to end 90 minutes later on two different Wednesday's since students had early release days on Wednesdays; students were comfortable with this time.

The principal's recommendations met my criteria to identify students across difference. Specifically, I sought a minimum of one male and one female student from both 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. I focused on these grade levels, as these students presumably had greater opportunity to work with a variety of teachers in the school setting. Additionally, I ask the principal to seek balance from a combination of any of the following demographics:

- Ethnicity/ Race
  - SES
  - Home Language

When identifying and inviting focus group students, I emphasized the purpose of this research and constantly re-iterated the level of anonymity to be held – including of the school – to minimize any impulse to pick students based on any predetermined hope or fear of what students might say in a focus group. Invitations included a description of the study’s purpose, student-participants’ expectations, and the incentive to be provided for participation (their choice of a \$10.00 gift card to a bookstore, juice store or movie theatre). Once students gave initial agreement, I used the IRB process to ensure permission from both the students and their parents/ guardians.

Once I obtained recommendations from both the principal and students, I wrote to the recommended teachers to introduce them to my research and invite them to participate in a reflective writing and working retreat to reflect on their practice and to examine and assess what they might consider pivotal experiences leading to their current

stance and results as a teacher. The reflective writing and working retreat took place on June 24, 2011, in a conference room, which was rented at a local coffee shop.

I used the IRB process to invite the recommended teachers to participate; the invitation included a description of the study's purpose, teacher-participants' expectations, and the incentive to be provided for participation (breakfast, lunch and a \$40.00 gift certificate to a bookstore).

Note: Because I did serve as the Co-Principal of Success Academy, my positional authority may have influenced teacher and student participation – as well as my own interpretation of a teacher's practice; thus I recused myself from identifying both "students at the cusp" and recommending Transformed Teachers to minimize this bias or influence.

## **Data and Analysis**

While I collected and used data from the student focus groups to determine teacher-participants, my primary data came from the transcriptions and written reflections collected during the reflective writing and working retreat. These notes were collected using a variety of methods:

- Each student focus group was recorded in their entirety. Additionally, each student submitted in writing her or his own written pre-flection. While I transcribed the written pre-flections, the recordings were sent to a third party (I-Source of Transcription Star in California) for professional transcription. In total there were 88 minutes and 30 seconds of recording for the student focus group.
- For the teachers' reflective writing and working retreat, all group discussions (not individual writing time, small group discussions or interactive sessions)

from reflective writing and working retreat were recorded and sent to a third party (I-Source of Transcription Star in California) for professional transcription. In total there were exactly 122 minutes of recording for the teachers' reflective writing and working retreat.

- Teacher-participants submitted in writing their own written pre-flections and reflections. Major, interactive activities (Text Rendering and Chalk Talk Protocols) were charted. I transcribed both the written reflections and the charts.

Using methods from descriptive and nonparametric statistics, I recorded, had transcribed, coded and analyzed student data to calibrate an understanding of transformative teaching and to identify transformative teachers (and thus a higher potential of being Transformed Teachers). I also clustered student demographic data through a written Student Focus Group Pre-flection Sheet (see Appendix C). With the adults I collected initial data first through a written Teacher Pre-flection Sheet (see Appendix D), which teacher-participants completed prior to attending the reflective writing and working retreat; these included not only demographic data, but also two open response questions. Throughout reflective writing and working retreat notes, participants engaged in cycles of work and reflection in which they participated in a whole group, meaning making activity, reflected quietly, shared their reflections in small groups and then ended with more written reflection. For the transcripts and written reflections, I used nonparametric statistics to seek patterns across diverse adult voice and seek not only connections or gaps to previously defined qualities of transformative teachers, but more explicitly how one comes to be transformed by seeking patterns or outlying data attributed to becoming the teacher they are – and therefore what might inform the development of other Transformed Teachers.

## Student Focus Groups

- Each student completed a Student Focus Group Pre-flection Sheet in which she identified herself and her demographic descriptors; additionally, each student completed narrative questions to describe her preliminary thinking about transformative teaching and transformative teachers.
- Prior to focus groups, I ensured each student had access to a digital camera in order to take photos of people, places, things and scenes that help them describe effective, transformational teaching. I collected but did not use these photos as not all students completed the task.
- Each focus group was guided by the same Student Focus Group Agenda (see Appendix E).

The student focus groups were used to provide a set of recommended teachers who have provided transformative experiences for their students, and thus, may in fact have experienced – consciously or unconsciously - their own transformation in, through and beyond school as a reproductive system.

Additionally, the rich discourse and data of these focus groups provided their own interesting patterns. While these findings may not be new to some literature in the field (i.e. Darling-Hammond, L., 1995; Ladson-Billings, G., 1994; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004), the voices of these students warrant restating in their own words.

In my first review of the transcripts, I distinguished those quotes that referenced their actual transformative experiences from quotes that related to the teachers who created the experiences for them. The former reiterated or built on existing knowledge of the kinds of learning experiences valued by diverse students. Of particular interest from these focus groups was a solid and consistent theme of educational experiences related to

supporting communities. Students iterated the importance of experiences that helped them to see their own potential to have a positive impact on others within communities. Specifically, students referenced and reflected on A) experiences that occurred out side the traditional classroom experiences and B) those that occurred within the formal classroom experience.

- A. Students frequently referenced experiences that occurred outside of the traditional classroom (including in the halls) usually in and related to real world experiences, and had an impact on their communities (such as a school supported Peace March or various life learning experiences that occurred *within* their communities). Of particular importance to students was the opportunity to do authentic work within the context of their own community. Students referenced these outside the classroom experiences with phrases such as “he knows how to relate it to us even if it’s not in classroom” (Latina Junior); “when I’m talking with him like outside of the class, he tells me how I could change the system; I just have to work with my community” (Latina Junior), and “...we went to a youth conference where it was youth that were running it” (Male Asian Senior).
- B. Students referenced and valued classroom curricula that not only shared the important stories of others within their own contexts (e.g. the Holocaust), but more specifically were taught in a manner that allowed students both to develop compassion and empathy and to connect to their own life experiences (e.g. struggles of their own communities). Students expressed a strong value for curriculum that connected them and opened them up to diverse perspectives. This work connects with patterns that come up later in the Transformed Teachers’ reflective writing and working retreat in which there is a need to develop and work as allies across difference. Students described this type of classroom curriculum with powerful and reflective language, “I

feel if you could be understanding and connect yourself to somebody else's problem or somebody else's struggle that that could push you to changing yourself in your community and just in the world." (Male African American Junior). Other students identified the importance of transformative curriculum not only as a way for students to connect with their outside worlds, but also for teachers to connect with their students (and visa versa),

...the teachers I nominated, they told me, "my life wasn't as hard as yours. I didn't have to go through half of the things you went through" ... But it's about the books because the books open your mind to other perspectives of people's lives. (Latina Junior)

### **Teacher-Participant Pre-Election/ Demographics**

Because it is assumed that self-identity – as it relates to expectations of similar or dissimilar students – may correlate to the work of teacher transformation, I consider this to important data and have decided to include the demographic data (as reported by the teacher-participants themselves) in this chapter rather than the methodology section.

#### **Years of experience.**

Every teacher identified her or himself as being an educator for no less than six years, however when considering actual status as a credentialed teacher, the years of experience for teacher-participants ranged from four to sixteen years. Each of the teacher-participants who could not make the reflective writing and working retreat also had been in the classroom for at least six year. Two teacher-participants offered additional details:

- “4 years as a credentialed teacher, thirteen years as an educator” (Maya, Teacher-Participant), and
- “10 years teaching + 5 years principaling = 15 years total!” (Pat, Teacher-Participant).

### **Roles.**

Not one teacher-participant simply wrote “teacher” as a response to this prompt. Some indicated the roles to which they now were promoted (AP, Principal), and those still in teacher roles indicated the specialized or additional roles that they played in their schools with students or with other teachers (Peer Resources Coordinator, Activities Director, RSP, Advisor and [teacher] Coach). One teacher-participant is no longer a teacher, but because he did not submit his pre-election form, this researcher does not know how he would identify himself for this prompt.

### **Teacher-Participants.**

An overview of each participant and how they self-identified is listed below:

Table 1. Teacher-Participants' Pseudonyms and Demographics

Pseudonym/ Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Ethnicity	Home Language	Role	Years
Ben	M	Black	DNA	English	<i>DNA (no longer teaching; serving on multiple education boards)</i>	DNA
Cris	F	White	DNA	English	RSP Teacher	9
Diego	M	Latino	Mexican American	English <sup>2</sup>	Teacher and Peer Resources Coordinator/ Activities Director	16
Lizzie	F	White	White	English	Teacher and Advisor	6
Maya	F	Hapa	Jewish	English	DNA	13
Pat	F	White	Jewish	English	Humanities Teacher and Coach	15
Pink	F	White	Jewish	English	Assistant Principal	9

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<sup>2</sup> Diego later indicated that Spanish was spoken in his home when he was growing up.

### **Gender.**

The breakdown of gender for teacher-participants, as well as those who were nominated but could not attend the reflective writing and working retreat, is as follows:

Table 2. Recommended Teacher Gender by Attendance

<b>Attendance/ Gender</b>	<b>Attended</b>	<b>Did Not Attend</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Female</b>	5	3	<b>8</b>
<b>Male</b>	2	2	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	7	5	<b>12</b>

### **Race.**

The seven teacher-participants identified themselves racially as follows:

Table 3.1. Teacher-Participant Race by Gender

<b>Race/ Gender</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>Hapa</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	1	1	-	-	<b>2</b>
<b>Female</b>	-	-	1	4	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>

The racial identities of the five teacher-participants who could not attend are as follows:

Table 3.2. Recommended Teacher (not attending) Race by Gender

Race/ Gender	Pacific Islander	Black	Latino	White	Total
<b>Female</b>	-	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
<b>Male</b>	1	-	-	1	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

### Ethnicity.

The seven teacher-participants answered identified ethnically with a bit more range:

Table 4. Teacher-Participant Ethnicity by Gender

Ethnicity/ Gender	African American	Mexican American	Hapa	White	Jewish	Blank	Total
<b>Female</b>	-	-	1	1	2	1	<b>5</b>
<b>Male</b>	1	1	-	-	-	-	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

### Home language.

All seven teacher-participants indicated that they spoke English at home (even though one – Jewish female - jokingly wrote that she spoke English “w/ various accents depending on mood & spirit” (Pat, Teacher-Participant). Later, during the reflective writing and working retreat one teacher-participant did note that Spanish was spoken at home when he was growing up.

## **Participant Rights**

As part of my preparation, I successfully completed the IRB process. Within this process, I ensured anonymity to all participants. Additionally, I developed consent forms and obtained consent not only from each student and teacher, but also parents of students who were under the age of 18 years.

## **Chapter IV: Analysis**

*“Meaning making results from both individual and collective processes,”*

(Kathy Guthrie and Holly McCracken, 2010, p. 15)

### **Introduction**

I conducted a facilitated participatory interpretive study in which I first engaged with students to share their perspectives and descriptions of transformative learning experiences they have had, their thinking about the characteristics of teachers who have been transformative for them, and thus potentially of the Transformed Teacher. In reviewing the data from the student focus groups, I first read through the transcripts tagging and sort words and phrases in search of emerging patterns – or outliers – in particular, as the data related to descriptors, first of transformative learning experiences and then of their related teachers.

This process led to a list of 28 power quotes, (see “Student Focus Group Quotes”, Appendix F) that strongly represented the patterns that surfaced. I then did three additional readings in which I coded and sorted categories and clusters for analysis.

For the reflective writing and working retreat, I used similar analysis strategies. After merging the transcribed reflections and notes from the retreat with the transcriptions, I read through the entire document once and then a second time to tag initial patterns and outlier data, identifying initial categories. I then re-read the documentation no less than three additional times – again, tagging and coding into

clusters for analysis. During these additional readings however, I limited the texts to the specific components contained by the reflective writing and working retreat's preparation and agenda (pre-flection, Cycle I, Cycle II and Cycle III). After completing an analysis of each section independently, I considered the entirety of all the analyses together before finalizing my conclusions and recommendations.

### **Student Focus Groups**

Transformative Learning Experiences: The students seem to clearly identify as their transformative experiences those that most empower and connect to them. Embedded in their examples are multiple opportunities for students to explore, develop and act on their belief systems and values. Students were clear in their connection between the mutual benefit of learning about and working with others as well as with and for a larger community effort. They also seemed to value the importance of not only taking action as a way of learning, but also engaging in academic study of the related issues when connected to the potential for action and character development. From the students' words, I could see that students had high expectations for themselves and their own potential, and they valued when adults in their lives demonstrated the same belief in them, whether it be in the classroom, the hall or the community. Embedded in the act of developing their own leadership potential seemed to be where students found much of their own transformative opportunities.

Transformative Teachers: In reflecting on the teachers that provided these transformative experiences, I found student statements to be so thoughtful and insightful that I collated them (without name or demographic descriptors given the small sample size) as a text, "Student Focus Group Quotes" (see Appendix F) to be used at the Transformed Teacher reflective writing and working retreat that took place with a group

from the recommended teachers. I reviewed the student focus groups' transcripts a second time, focused solely on these quotes to identify patterns and outliers within the data as a whole. A set of themes about transformative teachers (those that provided transformative experiences for their students) emerged. Students stated and suggested that transformative teachers were those teachers who:

- are aware that schools were part of "The System",
- treat students with equality,
- can be tough – but were also fair and caring,
- know their content,
- scaffold learning,
- hold all their students to high and rigorous expectations,
- encourage and support their students, and ultimately
- don't give up on their students.

With a third review of these quotes, I categorized each quote, individually, as a potential cross-reference with those themes that emerged from the second review. From this review, I surfaced the following themes to further or more deeply identify transformative teachers as teachers who,

- recognize the System in which they are working;
- value and prioritize community (perhaps as a counter-response to the impact of the System);
- connect students need to succeed as a means to counteract the impact of the system;
- treat students equally and fair
- combine academic rigor and support (as evidenced by scaffolding, high expectations, pushing, and not giving up);

- provide students with encouragement, hope, and inspiration;
- provide personalized learning experiences and interactions;
- form relationships with students - as mentors, role models, coaches and allies.

Finally, a fourth review of this text for the purpose of cross-referencing, combining and categorizing all the emergent themes, revealed six clusters, from which there seemed to be three pairings that aligned with the widely known “3 Rs” priorities – Relevance, Rigor and Relationship:

- Pairing One – Relevance
  - Transformative teachers have an awareness of “the system.”
  - Transformative teachers make transparent to students the relationship between success in school (the system) to educational success (knowledge and opportunity).
- Pairing Two – Rigor
  - Transformative teachers hold equally high expectations for all students.
  - Transformative teachers hold high expectations for themselves to provide ongoing support to students.
- Pairing Three – Relationship
  - Transformative teachers make personal connections with students.
  - Transformative teachers have strong beliefs and high expectations for students as persons and community members.

### **On relevance.**

*“I, actually, think that is true, that teachers are taught to base...to judge students when they first see them...” (Latino Senior)*

Students seemed quite clear that teachers they identified as providing transformative experiences for them were well aware that school is a “System” that does not necessarily intend to serve each student equitably. To some extent, students referenced that such transformative teachers did or needed to recognize that they had to fight against the System; “it’s like we try to change the system but we don’t change the system. It changes us” (Female Multiracial Junior).

While I did expect students to hold some concept that their schooling experience was part of a larger system at play, I found notable, the depth of language and knowledge – the competency that students brought to this topic and discussion. Of the 28 quotes, 11 students used language to explicitly name and explore concepts related to race, equity, justice school as a system, etc. It seemed clear to these students that there was a systemic force at work and that they and their teachers had roles in its workings.

Students easily distinguished between the concept of “equity” as a necessary strategy for systemic change based on need, and “equality” as the baseline for respectful engagement of individuals within a community; “...because they see more as equality than equity, which means giving more to whoever needs it” (Latina Junior). In no less than least a half-dozen different instances, these students shared – as if it was assumed - that one cannot recognize the system without questioning and adapting their own behaviors within it. Students were very quick to connect transformative teachers awareness of the system with these same teachers’ penchant for fairness and equality; *“the way she teaches, she shows her passion about justice and about us learning... like us being treated the same as everybody else. I think she is the one who really changed the way I am now”* (Female Multiracial Junior).

Transformative teachers help students to see connections (and therefore relevance) between success as the school system defines it, and their own educational

success (or lack thereof). Sometimes these connections were made through very explicit and personal references to students' lives , communities and histories, "he would be like, 'People have made sacrifices for you to be here today'" (Male African-American Junior). Sometimes these connections were made through the lives, communities and histories of others, "when you read books, it gives you a feeling of how the people, like you feel for what you're reading or the struggles that the people are going through. Once you read a lot about all these struggles, it becomes a part of you and it becomes a part of your struggle and who you are" (Female Multiracial Junior).

Whether transformative teachers make these connections explicitly or implicitly, they seem to have a lasting and transformative impact on their students and their students' awareness of the importance of succeeding in the face of the schooling system. Ultimately, most students in the focus groups seemed to express that transformative educational experiences often related to some form of support for their own or others' communities. While it was not stated directly, it was clear to me that these valuable experiences were, in part, to counter the intended effect of public education for them as individuals, for their larger communities, and even for our societal community as a whole; "...he tells me how I could change the system; I just have to work with my community" (Latina Junior).

### **On rigor.**

*"I feel like he said that there're a lot of teachers that... know what's wrong with the educational system and they still try to fight against this. But, at the same time, they teach us what we're supposed to know."* (Female Multiracial Junior)

Transformative Teachers have high expectations of all their students – and hold them to rigorous academic work and habits. Of the 28 quotes, 13 students referenced and valued when teachers communicated, demonstrated, expected or modeled belief that they could reach rigorous standards of knowledge, work and being. Based on the context of the student stories and examples it was clear that rigor was seen as being tough, and also was complimented by a sense of authentic care and again, fairness.

The notion that transformative teachers hold high expectations was not limited to expectations of students. Students frequently referenced how it was not enough that these same teachers provided powerful experiences for their students, but that they also would go above and beyond to provide the support needed until students reached these high expectations. In these reflections, students seemed able to connect the close relationship between the academically rigorous expectations transformative teachers hold for all of their students and the rigorous expectations they hold for themselves as practitioners to support their students to achieve academic success. As one Latina Junior reflected, “...my critical thinking was already deep, but she made it go to another extent; I didn’t know it could go that far.”

With no less than 13 references, through language such as “expect”, “push” “help”, and “support,” it could be shown that these students saw this support in the form of strong pedagogical practices, including scaffolding as well as frequent check-ins, individual coaching and pushing throughout the learning process. One Latino Junior seemed to capture many of the words and sentiments when he stated about one of the teachers he recommended as transformative,

He’s just a very tough teacher but he’s a good teacher. He knew what he was teaching at the same time like he would give you something and expect you to do it. But if you didn’t do it, he would help you.

### **On relationship.**

*“I’m pretty sure she teaches everyone else; it’s just that she teaches me. She does that well.”* (Male African-American Junior)

Transformative teachers connect with their students personally. This quality is more than a general caring for; students referenced at least seven unique times that transformative teachers commit to and forge traditionally rare, deep professional relationships with their students. As a Latino Senior suggested with a white female teacher he found transformative, “she’s kind of more as a role model. Like if we’re acting up, she won’t yell at us like other teachers. She’ll probably talk to us, pull us aside or something. ...she’s like a mentor.” Ultimately, students defined transformative teachers to be the equivalent of allies for them. While this observation may sound simple, developing relationships is difficult enough for many; adding the complexities of power and positionality within a school (no less in society) – as well as the paradigm shift for many teachers that personal relationship is actually a job expectation only further complicates and adds value to the power of this theme emerging for students.

In the same way that transformative teachers are committed to support their students to succeed at their rigorous academic expectations, they also have strong beliefs and expectations for their students to be all that they can be as persons and community members. As was demonstrated in no less than 11 student quotes, these characteristics often take form as encouragement, hope and inspiration for the student as a person, valued member and potential leader for the community. Regardless of the form, what seemed to be unanimous with students was the way it was experienced, specifically and simply that transformative teachers “don’t give up” on their students. A Latina Junior was able to correlate this extra support to the larger social justice implications at the root

of this study, “...he gives me that extra push to not give up on myself and all that. I could be the same as any other white person in another school.”

### **Analysis of Critical Teacher-Participant Pre-Flection/ Open Responses**

Because it is assumed that self-identity – as it relates to expectations of similar or dissimilar students – may correlate to the work of teacher transformation, I consider demographic data to be important data. As part of the nomination process, I asked teacher-participants to complete a pre-flection (six of the final seven teacher-participants did) in which they shared demographic data as well as responded to open ended prompts. These open responses offered surprisingly important data themselves.

**Open Response #1:** *In 2-3 sentences describe what kind of teacher you think you are – and why.*

Each of the teacher-participants’ answers was complex and multi-layered, as demonstrated by Diego’s reflection, “*I think I’m a caring, kind, inspiring and respectful teacher. I use a constructivist approach so that I can help and coach students as they explore information from a variety of sources and make their own meaning.*” Five of the six teacher-participants who responded focused on affect, describing themselves with words such as “caring,” “kind” and “loving.” One stated, “I am guided by love – of self and community – and want to help my students love themselves and each other” (Maya, Teacher-Participant). Some respondents added layers of intensity in describing themselves, using words such as “passionate” and “fierce.”

Five of the six respondents answered this prompt with references to the expectations they held of and for students, including, students being smart and capable of working from integrity, reaching high academic expectations, making their own meaning

and empowering themselves through education. Four teacher-participants specifically referenced expectations they held of themselves (including their practice and their peers), which included having high expectations of their students, acting with integrity, developing relationship with students, using culturally relevant practices that connect to the students – but not so rigidly that they don’t also adapt based on students’ strengths and needs. One teacher-participant put it in these words, “I am ‘the spook who sat by the door’ – a mixed race woman who has infiltrated the system that oppresses us and is working to transform the system from the inside out” (Maya, Teacher-Participant).

**Open Response #2:** *In 2-3 sentences state why you became a teacher.*

Both teachers of color and white teachers were nearly unanimous in their responses that the intended impact of their decision to become an educator was to have a positive impact on students and for many, an interruptive impact on the school system’s negative impact. Teacher-participants described the student outcomes they desired to impact to ensure students were successful beyond school; these included but were not limited to students developing “the self-confidence, self awareness, skills, habits and values that will position them to be positive change agents” (Pat, Teacher-Participant), and learning “about the natural world (so that) they would care about it and take the necessary steps to protect it. (Pink, Teacher-Participant).

Yet, “pre-flection” responses surfaced some interesting patterns based on how teachers identified themselves racially – and one that would resurface during the reflective writing and working retreat.

Even though the sample size for this group is small, each teacher-participant who identified as a person of color located her or his motivation to teach as closely aligned to

her or his own experiences as a student of color. Each wanted either to provide opportunities and access to the positive experiences they had,

I became a teacher because of my personal history. I'm a 1st generation college graduate from a rural town, whose parents are Mexican immigrants, who was fortunate to have some amazing teachers/ mentors, especially in elementary school. I want all students to have access to an amazing education like I had at Stanford (Diego, Teacher-Participant);

or to interrupt the negative and damaging effects they experienced, as reflected by Maya, “duality defines my experience as a mixed race woman... I received an education that prepared me to succeed academically, but I experienced a lot of racism and exclusion along the way.”

Even though specific details varied between the white teachers, there was as clear a sense from the collective of their responses that what motivated them to become educators (while obviously connected to) tended to be located outside their own personal stories as students or a people; “I teach so that young people feel free and can take care of themselves and their communities” (Pink, Teacher-Participant).

White teachers were motivated by the belief that they had something to offer others who were different than they – based on what they believed to be the experiences of those they intended to serve; “I became a teacher to provide an excellent education to young people of color, the students who are often most neglected” (Cris, Teacher-Participant). Every white teachers offered language such as “a job with purpose” or “meaning”, suggesting they wanted to teach so that they could have a job aligned with doing something “for” others rather than either with them or even for themselves.

This initial and unexpected finding leaves me with some preliminary and basic questions. As each of the teacher-participants was a nominee for having created

transformative experiences for students (and sometimes for peers), what is the role of “stance” (why one is doing what they do – and for whom... for whose benefit – initially and ultimately?) How does race and experience influence not only one’s stance, but also – and as a result, their impact? Are certain stances to be expected based on race – are they to be anticipated? Or, just to name it – to what extent should it be expected that white allies will maintain some form of extrinsic motivation simply based on the characteristics of white, dominant culture (reference – valuing their own work, own success) and to what extent is this to be seen as part of the journey of transformative – white – teachers, constantly needing to examine and assess their “i-centric” sense of purpose.

While both groups were motivated by factors that stemmed from the self, one group (teachers of color) saw themselves in the community impacted by public education – and ultimately would provide for itself, the solution (“we-centric”) and the other (white teachers) saw themselves in the solution provided from the outside (“i-centric”) – perhaps even as the solution, as indicated in the reflection of why Pat became a teacher: “to change the world.”

It is important to note that these differences were not and should not be viewed as right or wrong, especially since these difference patterns surfaced amongst a small group of teachers who were identified as the ones effectively educating and providing transformative experiences for their students regardless of demographic predictors. Rather, these patterns serve to provide insights and a set of lenses to consider the work teachers – and different teachers – may need to do towards their own transformations.

These patterns continue and deepen later when teacher-participants reflect on why they believe and how they feel about being nominated as a transformative and potentially

transformed teacher. These questions will be expanded then, including the potential connection to the role of humility within the work of the Transformed Teacher.

### **Analysis of Reflective Writing and Working Retreat: Block Party, Socratic Seminar and Written Reflection**

#### **Cycle I: transformative teaching (descriptive stage).**

Hypothesis A: Teachers who create transformative experiences for their students may have experienced transformative experiences themselves.

- Describe the dimensions of a transformative teacher.
- How do you feel about being nominated as a teacher who has transformed students' experiences?
- Why do you think you were nominated as a teacher who has contributed to the transformative experiences of students?

In the first major component of the reflective writing and working retreat, I shared with teacher-participants quotes selected from the analysis of the student focus group transcripts. Teacher-participants identified at least one specific quote that resonated with them and then discussed the whole collection as a group. The focus of the quotes and discussion was “transformative teaching,” or teaching that has contributed to transformative experiences for students. After the discussion, teacher-participants wrote about and discussed in small groups not only their own description of transformative teaching, but also their reactions and reflections of being nominated as a transformative

teacher. The underlying hypothesis behind this writing and working cycle is that teachers who create transformative experiences for their students may have experienced transformative experiences themselves.

Intended to be a pre-cursor, a pre-reading strategy for the Socratic Seminar, the Block Party protocol and its debrief surfaced data itself, and thus is considered with the Socratic Seminar and the related written reflection for this portion of the analysis.

During this piece of the work, teacher-participants were quick to make connections and to highlight divergent thinking from their own. Of particular importance, the teacher-participants highlighted not only concepts specifically named or described by students (community, teacher integrity, awareness of school as a system and distinguished from education), but also those that grew out of reading the words of students (self interest, self-awareness, challenging assumptions).

This study does not assume that every teacher who has provided a transformative learning experience is by default a Transformed Teacher. It does posit that The Transformed Teacher - the one who has reached a minimum threshold of personal and professional transformation as described on page 20, does by definition consistently provide transformative teaching experiences for her students. This perspective served as the basis for the work of the student focus groups and was a starting place for the teachers during their reflective writing and working retreat. As a result, it is no surprise that students and teachers alike spend time defining what transformative teaching – and by extension, transformative teachers - looked like; these descriptors potentially were additional indicators of Transformed Teachers. After analyzing and discussing the initial work of the student focus groups, teacher-participants found little that they disagreed with, but rather further discussed student quotes in order to make and deepen meaning for themselves.

Transcripts reveal a list of specific and discussed characteristics for a transformative teacher. According to the teacher-participants, a transformative teacher is real, is more than knowledgeable in their content area, is self-aware, reflective and humble of her role in systemic oppression, teaches about the value of education for students to liberate themselves and their communities through education, and has informed opinions.

Note: While these categories vary slightly from the students', there seems to be more overlap than difference. The language that comes from the two groups aligns more to the group's language patterns than to the concepts. For the purpose of this study, both sets of categories will be considered conceptually for the final analysis and synthesis.

*"A transformative teacher is real with students and brings their authentic self to the classroom"* (Cris, Teacher-Participant).

**A transformative teacher is real:** teacher-participants frequently mentioned language (and modeled even in the work they did during the retreat) "authenticity," "honesty" and "fairness" as "primary components" – or necessary traits of a transformative teacher. Using terms such as, "they sense the sincerity" and "the relationship goes outside the class," teacher-participants made a correlation between being real and the important work of connecting with students. Furthermore, the importance of being real was not limited to white teachers working with students of color. While the work of white teachers and teachers of color may be different at times – even if most times – with our urban youth, the basic concept of being real extended to every teacher regardless of race, reinforcing the fact that one thing all teacher have in common is that they all experience at least some differences between themselves and

their students even if only in age, position and power. Diego shared, “I think sometimes people will assume because I’m a teacher of color that I can immediately relate to my students. I have to do a lot of work on myself just to kind of understand myself so that I can relate to them.” Even at this early stage of the retreat, the simple and yet risky work of reflecting on their own experiences in a small group of colleagues across racial difference seemed to create or foster enough trust, that participants began to discuss openly their own reflections as it related to teachers outside of their racial affinity in a manner that was not threatening and could be heard. Maya reflected on a discussion she and another teacher of color had recently had,

We were talking about why is it that some white educators are really effective in urban schools and others are completely ineffective... What we came to is that students really appreciate how real they are and how comfortable they are with themselves.

*“...a transformative teacher really goes deeper than just the standards and really helps students to see the connections to their own lives and provides space for that to be a part of the curriculum”* (Maya, Teacher-Participant).

**A transformative teacher is more than knowledgeable in their content area:** teacher-participants suggest that transformative teachers must be **Passionate about and Experts in** their content area – AS WELL AS their students and their students’ communities as is evidenced by **Connections and Personalization** made in the teaching and learning.

One could say that deep knowledge in one’s content area is essential to providing equitable access to excellent educational opportunities to all students, and based on the

perspectives of these teacher-participants, it also is arguable that content expertise alone still will leave some students falling through the proverbial cracks. If we are unaware of or do not prioritize student engagement with the content, we will lose learning opportunities and students themselves. Teacher-participants, referencing connections to standards and their own curriculum reinforced how important it is for a teacher to encourage student exploration and to meet “students where they are at and adapt(s) the curriculum so that all students meet the high expectations” (Diego, Teacher-Participant).

Furthermore, it was not lost to this group that context matters. Even though rigorous content and higher order thinking skills should be expected for all students regardless of demographics, the bridge to this work is situated in a student’s experience of school and educational values - which do not always coincide. For many urban youth, the teacher relevance, rigor and relationship work of connecting to, developing the trust of, and problem solving with students is complex and critical.

What this raises for me as a Biology teacher, to make biology content provocative was actually really challenging and that you know... you can connect it with environmental and social issues that then will lead to opinions... the teacher needs to understand that his or her work is actually connected to the larger work of liberation, and that the teacher knows their content and is committed to presenting it in such a way that actually the student can do the work, master the objective and can then connect it to other parts of their education or other parts of their life (Pink, Teacher-Participant).

The challenges and work of teachers teaching across difference are not limited to white teachers and students of color. Diego reflects on the work he must do for his white students (and by extension, students of color that may not be Latino) in ways that are similar even if not exactly the same as his white colleagues,

As a teacher of color, I always worry that I'm not getting my white students to reflect that deeply. You know, that I can really relate to my students of color and really help them see that they don't have to be the same as any student of color, that they can do anything. Sometimes I wonder if my white students are put off or you know, tuned out a little bit because I'm not connecting with them at that same deep level (Diego, Teacher-Participant).

*"A teacher who is reflective – ALWAYS – about what she teaches and how and why she teaches it to the students in front of her"* (Maya, Teacher-Participant).

**A transformative teacher is self-aware, reflective and humble of her role in systemic oppression:** often crossing the line between teachers who are transformative and teachers who have experienced some level of transformation themselves, trends within this category illustrate the complexity to recognize and respond to the knowledge that, as educators, we are part of the school system that does not serve everyone equitably.

Teacher-participants indicated – and demonstrated – that there are (and they themselves are at) many different levels or stages of self-awareness, from self-assessment of ones own biases to recognition of one's relationships with others like and unlike themselves. As a result of the data provided, one could argue that most important to teacher transformation is for teachers to be at any stage of self-awareness... versus none. Teacher-participants' discussion and reflections indicated that self-awareness itself is recursive and thus neither linear nor time-predictable; "it is a continual process and not an end result" (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant). They mentioned multiple times that the work of transformation and specifically, awareness requires constant work and inquiry; "I am

always assuming that there are things I need to learn, and ways I can and need to improve. You know I always have questions and try to maintain an inquiry stance within this work” (Pat, Teacher-Participant).

Furthermore, teacher-participants were able to verse the fact that self-awareness itself required at least the more external or cognitive – and transparent awareness that “the system,” its related theories at play, and its relationship to our current results even existed. This connection is integral as, “we’re all part of the system” (Pink, Teacher-Participant). Awareness becomes the door that can no longer be un-opened. Not only does this awareness influence actions and decisions of transformative teachers, but also it seeps transparently into the teacher’s practice as vehicle for providing truly deep transformative learning experiences and opportunities for their students; “transformative teachers acknowledge the inequities within our schooling system and are consciously working not to reproduce the same results. They are often explicit about this with students” (Cris, Teacher-Participant).

*“A transformative teacher helps students see that they could make a change in the world, in the system, in their community” (Cris, Teacher-Participant).*

**A transformative teacher teaches about the value of education for students to liberate themselves and their communities:** reflections viscerally reveal strong response to the fact that students may not know that education is liberating because school is so oppressing.

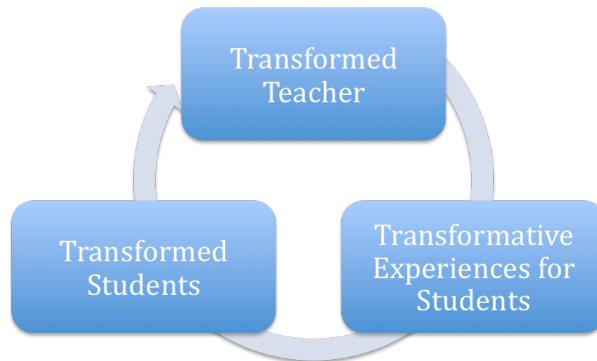
Beyond a basic awareness that our schools are part of a larger system of oppression, is seemed unanimous that it is vital to distinguish – not only for ourselves, but also and more importantly for our urban youth – that the larger product (intended and

actual) of public school is not equitable education – and for some not education at all. Part of the work of transformative teachers must be to help students realize “that school and education are two very different things” (Maya, Teacher-Participant). Arguably, this work may not be able to be done efficiently unless a teacher – through her own, ongoing transformation process – has been able to do that for herself as a product of and now agent for the schooling system. Maya continues to reflect that “education transcends schooling” and yet, students – in particular, students of color – need to learn or re-learn that “valuing education is a foundation of our cultures” because “part of our struggle is that we are severed from our history.”

Powerfully, there was much agreement that this process includes – at least for students, and therefore presumably for the Transformed Teacher – some level of larger community connection, involvement and activism. It seems necessary for students to have deep transformative experiences, they themselves must “see themselves as agents of change within society” (Cris, Teacher-Participant) and that transformative teachers help to make this happen. Thus, beyond awareness, transformative teachers must use their awareness – of themselves, the system, their students and the students’ communities to allow for multiple and deep connections and opportunities for activism and leadership between themselves, the system, their students and the students’ communities.

Given this emergent theme, the inter-connectedness between a teacher who is engaged in their own professional transformation and the transformative experiences they create for their students, there exists an almost unavoidable potential for personal transformation of their students. If, as is suggested by many, experiencing new possibilities with ones students changes a teacher’s beliefs, then it a natural cycle of influence follows:

Figure 2. Cycle of Transformational Influence



*“This conversation is bringing to my mind in Paulo Freire. [Laughter] I keep referencing him... because I’m deeply immersed in the book right now”* (Maya, Teacher-Participant).

**A transformative teacher’s opinion is informed:** Even though it was not an explicit variable discussed, teacher-participants constantly referenced their own experiences and other evidence for their opinions.

In addition to the life lessons they collected through their own experiences, teacher-participants frequently cited research and literature as part of the reasoning process. Teacher-participants referenced, quote and built off wisdom from the likes of William Ayers, Lisa Delpit, Patricia Ford, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Peggy McIntosh and Theresa Perry and (as shown above) Mark Twain. As a result of this observation, I am left to wonder what formal role might literature – in combination with one’s own experiences – play in teacher transformation as well as their own meaning and theory making.

Teacher-participants modeled this important characteristic as a way to base opinion – and by extension action to an ongoing building of knowledge – including the reflection and interrogation of this knowledge. One could argue that the effectiveness – not only in educating students but also in engaging in their own transformation processes is positively influenced by a commitment to inquiry and the practice of ongoing-learning and improvement that requires at least some level of humility.

### **Race patterns.**

Some of the patterns regarding qualities of transformative teachers that emerged were specific to white teachers. It was not that the participating teachers of color disagreed with the reflections of their white colleagues; they simply did not express the same sense of new enlightenment, surprise or curiosity. These specific patterns fell into categories that were more affective in nature. Using words, phrases and concepts such as “belief,” “empathy,” “fair,” “push,” “relationship,” “value,” and “willingness,” white teachers expressed the importance to work towards being teachers who are fair with, are committed to, hold high expectations of and are willing to push students. As Cris shared, being transformative requires a teacher to “both value(s) and “see(s)” students... even amidst struggle or resistance.” White teachers recognized that this affective work is complicated when white teachers are working across difference in the context of race and power in America, specifically because “when you add in the distrust most of our students show up with, we have to be authentic, grounded, comfortable in our skin” (Pat, Teacher-Participant). White teachers referenced how being transformative requires more than simply showing up and being there for students. “For many white teachers who WANT to help kids of color but who have not done the work to get really comfortable

with themselves in that role, they are plagued with guilt, discomfort, perhaps fear of their students, fear of their inability to help” (Pat, Teacher-Participant).

This pattern reinforced initial observations from the written pre-election in which white teachers saw their students very much outside their own experiences. Even beyond that of normal relationship building, they see as an essential component of their work, the need to build bridges that extend from their own, very different worlds into that of the students and their families. Teachers of color did not agree with the notions surfaced by their white colleagues, they just did not consider traits such as “seeing” their students as what was needed to be transformative – but rather what was needed simply to be a teacher. One teacher of color, in an effort push a white teacher to consider the root of why some of this “affective” component of transformative teaching might be – and need to be more work and more intentional for different teachers at different times, later stated, “I wanna say there’s this element of fearlessness - but it’s not, it’s recognizing your fear and walking through your fear...” (Ben, Teacher-Participant).

Even more stark, was the difference in how teacher-participants responded (across race) to one of the prompts listed in the first writing cycle, *“How do you feel about being nominated as a teacher who has transformed students’ experiences?”*

To the person, the teachers of color expressed humility – even questioning whether or not they deserved the nomination based on their incomplete results – specifically that there still existed students who were not being served justly. Diego shared, “if I have an individual student, or an entire class, that was not successful, then I feel like I have not done my job as a transformative teacher (Diego, Teacher-Participant), while Ben mused, “I am not sure that I am a transformative teacher because I could not reach all of the students whom I taught. More consistent with a we-centric stance, this perspective also represents the communal values related to success that is common to

many communities of color and communities connected to their cultural roots (Yosso, 2005).

Similarly, white teachers' reflections continued to support an i-centric stance. In general, these teachers viewed their nomination as validation – perhaps compensation for their input as a teacher; "if I reflect on the experiences, relationships and results I've had with youth, then I expect to be nominated" (Pink, Teacher-Participant). Thus, as much as the teachers of color reflected with concern for the students they still were not serving, the white teachers responded with happiness for their work having an impact; "fantastic! I love it. It's what I'm trying to do, why I got into education, why I work my ass off" (Pat, Teacher-Participant). This joy was felt even by the one white teachers who still questioned her own progress, "it doesn't really feel deserved and yet it feels wonderful" (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant). To some extent, these teachers recognized that they were doing something different than, and thus were more successful than, many of their other colleagues – especially other colleagues from the dominant white culture... and they are!

Still in support of the i-centric stance, one white participant even correlated her lack of success with certain students as evidence of the hard work and learning she had done.

Even with kids like that, I wonder what messages I gave them about their possibilities, abilities, choices.... I wonder what they took that was negative, and what was positive. That group of kids were what pushed me to try another approach. (Pat, Teacher-Participant)

On one level, one should question and learn from what it is about white, dominant culture that keeps those within it super self-protective even when they espouse to be in service of others and when the real risk to their own safety and power base is minimal if existent at all. On another level, it is equally important to consider and learn that these

patterns persist even amongst those within white-dominant culture who have been identified as successful models by multiple sources – even those for whom their acts of self-protection may limit opportunities for liberation. Ultimately, we must consider how our knowledge of how teachers across racial difference respond to their own transformation can inform how we can better support other teachers to engage in their own transformational processes.

One possible suggestion may lie in the first working and writing cycle in which white teachers' comments more likely continued to connect to an i-centric stance in a manner that seemed to seek comfort in disputing uncomfortable answers. For example, Pink found some comfort or hope in seeking evidence that maybe there was room for being identified as successful even beyond the recommendations that came from the student focus groups, “so there were lot’s of – there’s lots of things in this (student quote comparing good teachers to not good teachers)... like it shows that there’s actually conflict amongst students to determine what a good teacher is (Pink, Teacher-Participant). Frequently, these white teachers seemed to be in search of algorithms to get to the “right answers”:

So, is that the type of work that we should all be doing at the start of the year? Or in the case of the quote that Maya read... ‘at the end of the year’ I will put it all together. Like, is that too slow? (Pink, Teacher-Participant)

On the other hand, teachers of color continued to reinforce a we-centric stance by using student comments as means for giving authority and power to the students, as well as their historical experiences and expertise:

It’s so beautiful that a student has gotten to the point where he or she is locating him or herself in – in history... that’s why I became an educator. You know, part of our oppression and I say our as – as people of color, part of our oppression is

that we are severed from our history. And we don't – we don't know that education is a foundational part. It's a foundational value of our cultures. (Maya, Teacher-Participant)

Teachers of color also respected the expert voice of students as a charge for the teacher to further her/his own reflection – thus in which we not only share some experiences but also can influence each others' progress and success:

The first piece that caught my attention was about 'he has an opinion'. Because sometimes I'm like, 'Do my students know what my opinion is on this topic? Do I want them to know what my opinion is on this topic? How can I get them to develop their own opinion without me sharing mine? Or is it even possible to keep my opinion a secret?' So I mean, it's just really just that whole idea of my opinion was really powerful to me. (Diego, Teacher-Participant)

While this deep level of reflection was consistent – and public – for the teachers of color, as the work and writing cycle progressed, so did the depth of reflection and risk for the white teachers. An unexpected (but hoped for) impact of even this preliminary, scaffolding to the work the group did later was that it served as enough of an accelerant for these white teachers to engage in a deeper level of reflection with their colleagues across racial difference – even if the reflection was, at times, more external – cognitive or theoretical – in nature. This process of personal reflection and cross-experiential discourse seemed to be enough to push teacher-participants out of their comfort zone and to move into and engage within a dissonant space for learning and development. As evidence by one teacher-participant's thinking aloud about her own beliefs about transformative teachers moved her closer to seeing the importance of sharing responsibility for the work to be done, "teachers who are really effective with our kids have a sense of self-interest in the project... like are rooted themselves in the work and

don't see themselves as other or outside of, and I think, particularly for white people" (Pat, Teacher-Participant). Still, as she continued to make meaning of a student quote, she continued to deeper her own understanding, this time in language that was a little less external, reflecting how it might be shifting her own thinking, "so, it really... the fact that it... that this young person was really connecting these ideas of being a powerful teacher with being motivated by a sense of community and wanting the best for the community."

This was not an isolated moment for the white teachers. During the reflective writing and working retreat, I viscerally experienced white teachers' openness – to the person – at least to hear and discuss ideas and ways of thinking different than their own. What I am left to wonder is, to what extent is this behavior a result of the fact that students selected these specific teachers as potentially Transformed Teachers, and to what larger extent is this characteristic a quality of a Transformed Teacher versus a prerequisite to begin one's transformational journey? Furthermore, given the observation of teachers evolving their own thinking as part of their participation, I am left to consider how the space created and held as part of this research (i.e. reflective writing and working retreat with teachers across difference) helped create the conditions for teachers to engage in the very processes being questioned for this study. While this study does not intend to answer these questions, they do relate to this study's larger research question and thus isolates a specific moment in time in which it may be worth asking, "*How unique is it that these teachers behaved in this way? What work or experiences prior to this day allowed them to be this open so early together? What else will we be able to learn from the experience of the reflective working and writing retreat beyond the scope of this study?*"

By the end of this first cycle, the gray area between the notion of the transformative teacher (the one who provides transformative experiences and

opportunities for her students and peers) and that of the Transformed Teacher (the one who is a transformative teacher, but has done enough of their own work to have reached an undefined threshold or level of transformation – such that their transformation has become a consistent way of being) was becoming further blurred. Given the difference of terminology is not in the practices but rather the depth, intensity and consistency of practice, I found myself thinking of the teacher-participants as Transformed Teachers and will shift language to reflect this shift from this point forward.

### **Cycle II: transformed teachers (personalization stage).**

Hypothesis B: “Transformed Teachers” who have transcended the intended role of reproduction create transformative experiences for their students

- What constitutes being transformed and transcended? What does it look like?
- What has/ does being transformed and transcended looked like for you?
- Given that you have been nominated as a teacher who has contributed to transformative experiences for students, do you agree you that this is a result, in part, of your own transformation? If you agree – describe the pre-transformed you and the post-transformed you (what did you transform from, to?). If not, say more.

The second major component of the reflective writing and working retreat introduced participants to the notion of Transformed Teachers transcending intended roles within a reproductive school system. They were asked to define and describe what they believed this language to mean, and to reflect on possible catalysts for their own,

assumed, transformation. The hypothesis behind this section of work was that Transformed Teachers who have transcended the intended role of reproduction most likely and intentionally create transformative experiences for their students, increasing students' chances for their own transformation within the school system.

As participants moved into this new piece of work, they started with an initial discussion to share in meaning making around language as presented in the definition of a Transformed Teacher as presented in on page 22 this study. In particular, they found much to clarify about the meaning, reactions to and role of the language "self-consciousness" and "self-awareness" as defining characteristics of a Transformed Teacher. Interesting was the realization that reaction to and interpretation of these terms, as with any value laden term, was strongly influenced by experiences any person might have had associated with the terms.

That term in my life has had positive and negative associations... in this context... self-consciousness is actually a positive thing... As a teen, my mother advised me to not be so self-conscious... As a White adult, I have learned that I need to be self-conscious in my evaluation of my experiences and of my relations with others. I was self-conscious, but didn't have critical race consciousness until my work began at Success Academy. (Pink, Teacher-Participant)

Being that even a term intended to be neutral could be interpreted with subjectivity and a term intended to be positive my be experienced negatively (or visa versa), the teacher-participants' discussion served as reminder that it is very important that we define and make meaning of the many layers of our language as it relates to equity, social justice, transformation and liberation – especially if, as suggested by both student-participants and teacher-participants, awareness is an important condition for transformation.

As noted, this mixed group of Transformed Teachers was clear that before one can be transformed, she will need to be aware of, continue to develop awareness of, and accept who she is – in the skin she is in (i.e. race, gender, class, sexuality, pertinent and unique history and experiences) in relation to others and our educational system as a necessary step to transcending and transforming to the person she needs to be. As one teacher-participant shared, this awareness becomes a proverbial door that cannot be unopened – but that does not always lead to immediately knowing what to do:

Once you know that you recognize the injustices, you care to actually do something about them. In this work, I still feel like a baby. My growth has brought to a place of awareness and I'm now working toward action. (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant)

One can argue that with awareness – as it relates to power and privilege, oppression and subjugation, and our own roles within, almost inevitably will come some painful experiences. Thus, to engage in this work will require a level of healing from both our unique and our common experiences that have caused pain and distress (as students and practitioners) that we carry with us into our educational actions, discussions and decisions; Pat put it simply when she shared, “it’s never fun, but it hasn’t been excruciating in years. Teacher-participants referenced both their pains and their healing as pivotal experiences in their own transformations; consider Maya’s reflection on how this work helps her to heal, “the pain in my community is almost unbearable, and by doing this work, life becomes not only bearable, but a blessing. ”

Based on the work of the teacher-participants, I am left to wonder to what extent the community building and intentional conditions leading to the deeper discourse in which this group engaged, including teachers sharing their own stories and meanings, provided actual opportunities for teacher-participants to willingly engage with their own

pain and healing and thus serve to actualize some of the transformational experience and in turn, play a role in the accelerated participatory practices (i.e. openness, reflection, willingness to challenge ones own assumptions) described in the last section. How does the intended scaffolding of the day support a recursive process in which trust is necessary for courageous practice and courageous practice helps to develop trust? What about these practices relate directly to the teacher transformation we wish to see amongst all teachers?

As teacher-participants, read, discussed, wrote and discussed some more, trends surfaced to help describe what a Transformed Teacher is and what Transformed Teachers do. One unique concept that a teacher-participant raised as she explored her own thinking about Transformed Teachers was that of, “baby teachers” – not as an answer, but rather a necessary stage in transformation:

I was trying to imagine what teachers I’ve known who are very effective with these young people but who I don’t think have a self-consciousness about it and who haven’t done that work, you know. And like I had – like it raised questions in my mind when, you know, when you [another teacher-participant] were a baby teacher and I wondered like... it felt to me, like I have a story about you being just sort of... really naturally assuming certain stances and ways with kids even before, sort of having all of this – your own work done. (Pat, Teacher-Participant)

A phrase that some might experience as demeaning, “baby teacher” was both expressed with affection and received warmly. Teacher-participants found the phrase to be an appropriate meter stick by which to measure their own historical progress towards their current status within this group of transformative teachers, often reflecting on when and where they were baby teachers in their own transformational journey:

I’d love to be able to go back, given who I am now and with the sharpened

awareness I have now, and see myself again in my “baby teacher” days and return to that early process of helping to open a small school. (Cris, Teacher-Participant)

To some extent it must be gratifying – and freeing – to coin language and normalize the notion that transformation is neither immediate nor static. Maya embraced the notion with a level of confidence, “my reality, as a baby teacher, is not gonna be the same reality as a veteran teacher, but that that’s OK. I just need to know where I am in that journey.” To some extent it seemed as though the act of teacher-participants sharing their own “baby teacher” stories normalized stages of growth and development -- not only in comparison existing in a culture of fear that exists in our flawed school system (which ironically has misaligned structures of accountability), but also under the pressure that comes with the tremendous expectations that come with a vision of transformation. In a system that perpetuates oppression and therefore dehumanizes some of its members, this act of re-humanization may provide opportunities for educators to further and more expeditiously engage in the trust building and healing needed to develop relationships that teacher-participants later mention as necessary and catalytic for transformation.

Paradoxically (only because students are showing up to school every day), one must question, if “baby teacher” is a natural stage, why do we wait for teachers to be in school – students in front of them, before taking up the work of transformation? Why isn’t transformation a requirement to being a teacher? In reflecting on her own teacher education experience, Cris notes that the “work of the self is so much not part of preparing to be a teacher - in my experience” (Cris, Teacher-Participant). What might be possible if reaching a minimum threshold of personal transformation were required to teach? What would it take for this to happen?

Teacher-participants underscored an important point – for which there is much support: teacher transformation is complex, contextual and at times paradoxical.

Building off of Freire's concept of conscientization, supporting the notion that reality is not fixed (2009), one of the strongest – if not political examples was when teacher-participants wrestled with the tension between respecting the dynamic nature of teaching (and by extension, teacher autonomy), in part due to the relativity to any given situation, vs. the need to be able to say that some things within education were clearly right or wrong. Even though they seemed to know that they needed to land in a place where teacher autonomy might need to be compromised if it came at the expense of clear consistent and fair practices for students, teacher-participants seemed to need to authentically and publicly wrestle with and transform – not each others' – but their own stances as they discovered contradictions and conflicts in their own mental models.

In particular, Ben's reflection demonstrated his own struggle and growth. First, he recalled his years as a beginning teacher:

I remember being a new teacher and just being younger in general and just being so comfortable with – I wanna say a relativism. The fact that, you know, we all have our own experiences and there's no right or wrong, and then that's OK, and we can just sort of float around in this ambiguity.

Then, Ben compared it to his being a parent of children of color,

And you know, I got a 15-year old daughter, and I don't want ambiguity. I want... I want right or wrong... And... some kids... they need right and wrong. They need clear... what they need in that moment is for... an adult.

And finally, he brought it back to his own students,

I felt like one of my roles, and particularly teaching black and brown kids is like... some of these kids may come from extreme chaos right? ... There's always chaos and how much anxiety and stress that creates. And so I wanted a classroom

where they just knew the consequences - good and bad or negative, positive, or whatever you wanna say, there were just clear consequences where they can just navigate it.

But his struggle continues, as it should,

I am struggling with relativism and wanting to know when is the right time to sort of... when is the time for the teacher in the classroom to trust his or her own experience and making a decision one way or the other when it comes to the students' life or action or the classroom as a whole?

Pink soon built off of Ben's work to that of her own, in the skin she is in,

One hesitation is as a white woman in the classroom, I need to filter all the things that my experience might be that are just dominant culture bullshit... until I can get to the place where I can be like, "Actually that's wrong no matter what".

Layers of discourse further suggest that even in this discovery, there continues to exist the potential for another false dichotomy to keep us busy trying to choose between polar options, fueled by self-interest. As we consider the either-or of relativity (which at best, promotes respect for teacher expertise and professionalism and at worst, ensures the larger status quo is not interrupted) versus prescriptive definitions of right and wrong (which at best, ensures a level and clearly defined playing field for all and at worst, limits our solutions and strategies and therefore removes possibilities for many within our community), what other ideas or combination of ideas are we not considering? Perhaps this dangerous potential was not reached because the struggle was not between each other but rather with themselves and to some extent for each other.

While they did not explicitly name or describe this dynamic, this discourse of struggle and meaning making modeled that Transformed Teachers actually are willing to take up and constantly wrestle with more complex questions. These questions should

include, but not be limited to, “*How do I know my truth is the truth for the students before me? For what am I willing to take a stand, and why? What would it take to change my mind and actions?*”

Coming out of this section of the reflective writing and working retreat are additional patterns. Again and as should be expected, the themes from this part of the study have some common components and some differences from patterns that surfaced in the other parts of this study, all of which will be considered for the final findings. As a result of the work teacher-participants did around exploring and personalizing the concept of a Transformed Teacher, four trends surfaced:

1. Transformed Teachers engage in and are committed to constantly work on themselves.
2. Some of the Transformed Teacher’s work on themselves cannot be done alone.
3. Mentors, role models and coaches can be pivotal to the Transformed Teacher’s transformation process.
4. Both listening to and telling stories is a powerful and important part of the Transformed Teacher’s journey.

Transformed Teachers engage in and are committed to **constantly work on themselves**. The act of transformation is never finished, and given that the transformation is of ourselves, it stands to reasons that the work we do with and on ourselves is never finished. What seems to be embedded in this theme, which may seem obvious, is the level and type of work that is required.

This theme suggests that the work of the Transformed Teacher is of reflective inquiry – rigorous, reflective inquiry, which can translate to a constant interrogation challenging what the Transformed Teacher believes to be true from experience to

experience. Every new experience is a data point, which can and should challenge and call to question the teacher's decisions, actions, beliefs, expectations and operant theory.

In the classroom, I'm constantly reflecting and asking questions. I ask myself questions regarding issues of race, class, gender, etc. and how these variables play a role in my classroom, how they effect my teaching and the learning of my students, and how they help me to adapt my teaching for the future. Being transformed means that I do not settle and that I'm constantly willing to grow and improve. (Diego, Teacher-Participant)

As teacher-participants reflected on and discussed the level of individual and internal work that needs to be done, they emoted intensity and commitment. Using words and phrases such as "challenge," "constantly," commit," "excruciating," "never done," "painful" and "scary" these teachers who were clearly engaged in their own journeys of transformation, the constancy and intensity of their work felt brutal – and yet acceptable. There seemed to be an acceptance that the work of transformation, once engaged, was a way of life – or as more than one of them noted, "a way of being". This was felt in the room and what was felt was hope. To begin this journey is to open a door that cannot be un-opened.

The commitment to reflection seemed to embrace that we can never know who we are fully but must work from who we know ourselves to be today – and commit to knowing who we will be tomorrow. This commitment includes "doing the work on themselves that allows them to work in an oppressive system with young people who are being oppressed, and can change the oppressive forces around" (Ben, Teacher-Participant). Furthermore, this work must continue even if in our transformational journey we feel like we are taking steps backwards for we have to not only reflect and assess who we are, but also, as nearly each teacher-participant referenced in one form or

other - accept who we are. It is in this acceptance that we can move beyond emotions that may otherwise burden or get in the way of our progress – or serve as an excuse not to continue on our journey at all. Therefore, it comes up again that the work of the Transformed Teacher includes not only self-awareness, but also the feeling and healing can and should follow.

It stands to reason that the same opportunities of acceptance must be true for our students transformation as well. As Maya suggests, the very act of transformation by teachers provides for students important modeling and school culture development:

When a teacher can be herself and be effective in her work, it makes it okay for students to be themselves and to see that they do not have to check their identities at the door in order to be “successful.” (Maya, Teacher-Participant)

As an extension to this finding, it surfaced that working on oneself could including working within affinity – in particular, racial affinity – in order to do work on “ourselves” as a group of people with shared experiences. This was of particular importance to the teachers of color held strong opinion not only that white people needed to sort through some things without people of color, but also inferred that people of them color themselves had work to do that might better be served in the absence of their white colleagues. This relates to the second major finding: **some of the Transformed Teacher’s work on themselves cannot be done alone.**

While all the teacher-participants agreed that this work - at the very minimum - necessitates reflection and inquiry about themselves in relation to others, variance existed in how to organize and prioritize with whom which work occurs. Nobody disagreed that some of the work must be done with those across difference (usually as allies across racial differences). Furthermore, as was true with the analysis of earlier data, patterns for what was viewed as higher value and priority fell along racial lines. Again – every

teacher-participant believed Transformed Teachers work with and on themselves as well as with others across difference, in surfacing levels of priority, teacher-participants seemed to be discussing what was necessary before one could really be fully engaged in a transformational journey.

The data suggested that the perspective of the teachers of color consider teachers at their beginning stages of transformation needing to prioritize working alone or with others within racial affinity; Ben put it plainly, “you can’t come into the classroom with having to work on your own stuff. Go work on that, and then you gonna come back, right?” (Ben, Teacher-Participant) As will be supported later in this study, this perspective seemed to be centered around collegial relationships and did not include formal relationships in which teachers work with supervisors, mentors, role models, coaches, etc. across difference.

White teachers, on the other hand valued the need to engage in continuous reflection and shared work with others. They consistently acknowledged that much of the work to be done is personal and internal, and also cited - sometimes in the same reflections about the same work, that “you have to kind of choose and be conscious about and willing to do, but you can’t do it alone” (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant). Often, the others they were prioritizing the need to work with were colleagues of color so as to learn how to do or be differently, “I’ve also learned a ton from conversations with African American colleagues” (Pat, Teacher-Participant). Even in their written reflections about their own transformative experiences, the most common variable specific to white teachers related to the support they got from others – specifically across difference; sometimes the differences were defined by roles: “my students transformed me. They taught me how to be when in groups of people of color” (Pink, Teacher-Participant).

As I consider the reality that the diverse demographics and experiences of our schools and teachers would require us again to suspend a temptation to create yet another false dichotomy of “one or the other” or of “right versus wrong” and recognize that both are essential components to transformation.

What may be of more interest is the reason why even across differences, this false dichotomy exists. It is viable that the teachers of color may be reflecting or reacting to the fact that they exist in a white-dominant culture world and given the opportunity to NOT be the lead (as white colleagues step up to the challenge) for all anti-racist work may be a rare opportunity they may wish to take. It also is reasonable to hypothesize that our colleagues of color recognize that their very presence could influence white colleagues transformational progress either by providing insights prior to the work that needs to be done or by obstructing opportunities for some of the more honest and potentially racist work that needs to occur.

One could argue almost a contrapositive stance as to why our white colleagues may wish to ensure that they can do this work – even at the very early stages with colleagues across racial difference. On the one hand, it is not be unusual for well-intentioned educators to want to “get it right” and accessing the experiences of those with the personal experiences of feeling the impact of what the white people do certainly could provide this opportunity. Additionally, given the affective connection the white teachers demonstrated through earlier data, it also could be argued that their penchant to feel good about their work could be a motivator to working with colleagues across difference who can easily and quickly approve of their hard work and effort – especially when compared to most other white educators. Lizzie found it safe to reflect harshly on her own practice amongst this mixed group of colleagues, again referencing the support she got from peers who pushed her “gently to do better”, “I look back on things I did just two years ago and

am surprised I wasn't fired. I was afraid of students. I was afraid of confrontation. I was the typical white teacher of urban students" (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant).

Upon first glance, this analysis might seem to counter the previously held observation that white people acted in a more i-centric manner while people of color were more we-centric. However, a deeper read reveals that the white participants desire to work with those across difference (from students to peers to mentors), first and foremost was for the purpose of improving themselves as individuals – even if ultimately it could be argued that this would better support their students. Little if any artifacts surfaced that expressed – or even considered – what mutual benefit came to the “others” across difference.

I had many conversations with people of color where they called me out on pieces of my racism, my blind spots and offensive ideas.... And over time, I decided that it was a huge gift to be told, to have the opportunity to learn and grow. (Pat, Teacher-Participant)

I am left to wonder, do the teachers of color value and prioritize teachers doing work on their own (either as individuals or in affinity) not because they are being uncharacteristically i-centric, or is it because they are being protective of their community from potentially being used (even if only in perception) for the benefit of dominant culture – yet again? Even as a Transformed Teacher who is quite successful with students and families across racial differences, Pat continues to reflect in a way that brings to question what the mutual benefit is in our relationships across difference:

I have learned so many things over the years from my colleagues of color, and from my students of color, and from their parents when they've been willing to tell me what they see/ hear/ think/ feel in relation to me and my work. (Pat, Teacher-Participant)

Additionally, data from the teachers of color suggested that they were not considering only their white colleagues when emphasizing that some of the work teachers do happen with and for themselves. Rather, all three teachers of color indicated in their reflections the role of personal work in their own transformations. They surface an important and understated variable of the Transformed Teacher – as products of this system, we ALL need to engage our transformational journeys and preferably before students are in our care. Diego recalls his experience of moving from a somewhat comfortable and secure (though not rigorous) environment in high school to the more competitive environment at Stanford University:

I didn't really think that being Latino was going to hold me back because I had always gotten whatever I wanted... On day one at Stanford, I was a minority from a rural town with no worldly experiences who was underprepared, who did not belong and who should not have been attending such a prestigious university. It was as though hundreds of years of oppression were dumped on me, and I immediately internalized it. (Diego, Teacher-Participant)

Ben, had to work past his own internalized oppression related to his self-confidence and "letting go of this trivial fear about content and trusting my own academic abilities regarding the content and being mindful about how the content was being delivered" (Ben, Teacher-Participant). To various levels, each teacher of color expressed the work they needed to do on their own to transcend the messages and beliefs they had internalized and the academic roles that were being prescribed them from early ages.

The teachers of color often shared their own transformative experiences related to surviving and gaining voice. Often describing and comparing the type of person they were before transformation, "my pre-transformed self was afraid to speak up at staff

meetings and challenge inequitable practices at our school” (Diego, Teacher-Participant), to who they are now, the teachers of color identified that the work they needed to do with and for themselves seemed to be about redefining and healing themselves and their practice. This act of redefining seems to have been energized by a level of permission, either given by mentors as was the case with Ben, “mentors whom I trusted implicitly and explicitly told me the most important thing about teaching and being effective was not the content and the curriculae, but in fact was fighting the “isms” racism, sexism, homophobia etc.” (Ben, Teacher-Participant), or taken, based on historic results as was the case with Maya:

Many people enter the teaching profession for altruistic reasons. Mine is quite the opposite: Helping students discover the light in themselves is my vengeance against the oppression that once held me back. When I help my students, I help myself. When I help my students heal, I help my community heal. The pain in my community is almost unbearable, and by doing this work, life becomes not only bearable, but a blessing.

This also was a bit of a surprise as earlier analysis suggested that white teachers were more prone to take up the affective work when dealing with their students, almost external to their own work (i.e. we have to show our students we believe in them), but it was the teachers of color who more frequently identified the need for affective healing and confidence building when discussing their own transformational experiences; teachers of color needed to heal from their own experiences as a students of color. Claude Steele writes about Stereotype Threat as, “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, C., 1999, p. 46). All teacher-participants exhibited evidence that all of them have been – to varying levels - both victim of, and as a result

mechanism for, the systemic oppression that continues to plague our students. With the deep level of acknowledgement that this analysis identifies as a critical characteristic for Transformed Teachers comes the need for need for healing. As Transformed Teachers navigate the work they need to do in order to heal, how might the tension between relativity and clear definitions of right and wrong further complicate matters? Or, to what extent will the constancy of reflection and inquiry help assure that the Transformed Teacher navigates towards true, long-term healing and transformation and not merely the comfort of status quo, which temporarily may mask itself as healing?

While racial demographics correlated with patterns whom teachers believed they needed to do their own work with, there was a much more common understanding of the importance and influence of others when they had a more formal role associated with them – mentors. The third pattern that emerged was that **mentors and role models can be pivotal to the Transformed Teacher's transformation process.** Related to their diverse transformational experiences, teacher-participants' mentors and role models took different forms and were present at different times in their lives; they were family members, educators, coaches, peers and even students and their families. What was common was that mentors played significant, catalytic roles in transformational experiences for these teacher-participants. To some extent role models played pivotal parts for the different race groups by giving the aforementioned permission to step outside the “perceived” boundaries that may in fact serve hegemonic purposes, and to some extent they formally served as the ally across difference relationship some teacher-participants stated was necessary for their growth and transformation. While some teachers reflected on how they learn by observing others doing transformative work, Diego referenced how he sought out role models to help him sustain in his own journey, “I wanted to drop out during my second quarter at Stanford. I looked for role models at

Stanford who looked like me, not peers because most of my Latino peers were also struggling so they offered no hope.”

While mentors who shared experiences and were in affinity provided support for some of the individual work that needs to occur for transformation to begin, mentors across difference were able to provide the specific support that was identified as a necessary component for transformation – in particular for white teachers. Cris specifically remembered the impact of her “mentor at the time, who was African American, emphasizing that young people needed good teachers regardless of their race.” The importance of having mentors across difference were not limited to the white teachers, however. Maya’s relationship with a white teacher when she was a high school student proved to be critical to her own development as a Transformed Teacher:

It wasn’t until my senior year of high school that I realized that I had gifts to offer the world and should let my light shine. My peer resources teacher, Robert Wolfe (a straight, white man), was the one who helped me discover that light within myself. In his class I learned about the various “isms,” and started on the path towards social justice. For the first time, I hoped that the world could be different, and began to have hopes for myself. It is at that point in my life that I became connected with my purpose – to fight racism. ...I became a teacher because my teacher helped me overcome my internalized oppression. (Maya, Teacher-Participant)

Five of the seven teacher-participants referenced the role of mentors in their own transformation. Pink spoke of her unique journey by having identified herself with a culture that was mostly influenced by music and being in strong community with others based on a specific music genre (this included frequently traveling with large groups to follow specific bands). She later experienced dissonance – almost immediately upon

sharing a classroom with urban youth; it was the youth who helped transform her. And the seventh teacher explicitly noted the absence of a mentor (but later indicated that her move to a school with a collaborative environment provide peer-to-peer feedback that served similar purposes); “one of the main reasons I could be described as transformed has been because of peers at Success Academy” (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant).

As the teacher-participants’ thinking about transformation evolved, so did their reflection of the catalysts for their own transformations. The definition of mentor widened to include family:

My parents actively taught us about the culture and history of different groups of people (with heavy emphasis on African Americans), and were open and articulate about us being white, and what it means to be an ally, to be in struggle with others. (Pat, Teacher-Participant)

Sometimes family members were mentors as part of the rearing process and for some, family members helped teacher-participants see opportunities for interruption and transformation within life experiences. Maya reflected on how her brother took the opportunity to mentor her when she shared with him her fourth grade school report on why her favorite president was Abraham Lincoln:

My brother listened, but also asked me why Lincoln freed the slaves. I thought he freed the slaves because he was a good person who took a stand against the evil of slavery. My brother explained to me that I was wrong; Lincoln freed the slaves because he thought that would give him a tactical advantage against the South during the Civil War.

The next year, when her brother continued to challenge her, this time regarding the race of Jesus, she reflected on the follow up discussion with her teacher:

My teacher disagreed and reaffirmed that Jesus was white, but I no longer

believed him... My conversations with my brother represented a different reality to what I was being taught at school. What I was being taught at school represented the white supremacist hegemonic discourse. My brother taught me that there were other ways to see the world... My brother taught me the importance of questioning what I was taught and thinking critically about the information given to me and the motives underlying the curriculum. (Maya, Teacher-Participant)

Another pattern that continued for the teacher-participants is the tie between Transformed Teachers and literature. Teacher-participants continuously referenced relevant literature, including but not limited to, bell hooks' Teaching to Transgress and City Kids, City Teachers edited by William Ayers and Patricia Ford, Lisa Delpit's Educating Other People's Children as well as frequently citing the works of Paulo Freire, not only as support for their ideas, but also as factors and catalysts in their own work and transformations. These works by other leaders before them seemed integrated in their work and lexicon as teachers of color referenced these literatures usually to establish expert voice in support their own experiences; "Freire's exploration of the banking concept of education helped give words to my own oppressive experiences in education" (Maya, Teacher-Participant). White teachers referenced them usually to provide the expert voice outside their own skin in order to justify their work and thinking; "Lisa Delpit's work has had a profound impact on my thinking about the work I do with African American kids" (Pat, Teacher-Participant).

"We always walk into our experience with our stories, and we leave with – leave the experience with our stories" (Ben, Teacher-Participant). Another trend that surfaced was that of stories. **Both listening to and telling stories is a powerful and important part of the Transformed Teacher's journey;** Cris shared how she grew from listening

to others' stories, "I listened to students.... and I listened to a lot of stories from the older black women that I worked with and learned from those stories."

It also surfaced that the teacher-participants found it important to maintain a critical lens, recognizing that one's story may be just that – one's story; power comes from the meaning making we can achieve together from our collective stories, Maya described her approach to listening to others' stories, "I shouldn't just accept what somebody is telling me is reality but that there are different experiences that I can hear from and draw from."

In addition to discussing the importance of sharing and making meaning of our stories, throughout the retreat, these teacher-participants modeled what they were discussing. By both hearing their reflection of story telling as well as witnessing it in action, a strong connection was made between this trend and the previously discussed notion that Transformed Teachers must engage in the affective work of feeling and healing from the distress caused by their increased awareness of not only the systems of oppression at play, but also their roles within these systems. Sharing and making meaning of our unique and shared stories can provide a powerful and effective method in teacher transformation as it can offer opportunities for the healing that is necessary. Additionally, not only is story-sharing an effective practice for the mentorships which teacher-participants referenced as essential, but also it is in sharing our stories and holding those of others with different stories that we will be able to build the alliances across difference that supports our transformation and ultimately transfers to our practice with our students.

In the end, teacher-participants were able to engage in reflection of their own work and to some extent, their own analysis to create at least a locus of agreement around

larger parameters for what makes for a Transformed Teacher. According to these teacher-participants, Transformed Teachers....

- Are aware – and continue to develop awareness of our educational system, themselves and others, in the skin we are in, in relation to each other and our educational system.
- Have engaged in some level of healing from their own experiences in our educational system (both as students and practitioners as experienced in the skin they are in.)
- Engage in constant and continuous work on themselves through inquiry and reflection; sometimes alone and sometimes with others in affinity and across difference.
- Can accelerate their transformation and benefit greatly from formal mentors, coaches and role models - not just in the field, but also in one's own family and community. (Literature, to some extent can some of this support.)
- Share their own and listen to others' diverse stories – explicitly for the purpose of making shared meaning of reality.

### **More race patterns.**

Even though the white teachers recognized the importance of affective development to provide transformative experiences for their students – it was noted that these observations came with a sense of new enlightenment or at least were not so internalized that they did not need to be identified as important traits of transformative teaching. Perhaps it is the lack of internalization that led to the fact that when not explicitly prompted or challenged, white teachers, focused a lot more on the cognitive domain to describe an externalized list of strategies (almost reminders) for teacher transformation (whereas teachers of color reference these strategies as basic - just the

way to be, and thus needing fewer, prescriptive reminders). This pattern aligns with current thinking about white culture (Yosso, 2005) in which white people's power base can be maintained through academic domination based on definitions of knowledge that were created and nurtured by those in white-dominant culture. Even the very acts that white teachers referenced seemed to take the form of rituals to ensure they did the "right thing". Pat references the amount of verbalizing she does to make transparent and keep at the forefront the notion of social justice in her work with students across difference:

"I acknowledge the obstacles that people of color face in navigating the educational system in this country... I talk very often to my students about us all being here to change their lives, their families, their communities, and our world... I name it often, to colleagues, students, and their families. I say things like, 'As a white woman, I...'

Cris, on the other hand, references how structures help her to maintain a focus on doing the work that is necessary, but may not yet come naturally:

Our protocols at Success Academy, whether CFG support groups or personal experience panels, have also helped me to listen and to hold stories that help me be aware of and try to transcend prejudicial and oppressive beliefs and ways of being.

Again, unless specifically prompted or challenged (unexamined), even their reflections were externalized to ensure a level of safety and comfort that came with anecdotes or reflections about others (even teacher caricatures) rather than the vulnerability of their own examples. Pat reflected on a teacher who used to be at the school where she was principal; she describes this teacher as a "wild conundrum" who was effective with many of her students across difference but offensive to so many others

(including adults). Pat described the teacher as “incredibly white” and “very white hopefulish” and yet so many of her students “loved her and trusted her.”

As teachers of color, on the other hand, consistently referenced and reflected publicly on their own, very personal stories, they may have served as models – and to some extent perhaps, given permission for the white teachers to more quickly open up and focus a little more internally, on their own personal stories - when explicitly prompted or challenged. Pink described how being “smart, funny, loving, small and cute” allowed her to hold her students’ attention and take risks, while Lizzie opened up about how it felt to be a first year, white teacher in a racially and economically bifurcated school, “I remember recognizing this but not knowing what could be done or who to turn to. “

I am left to wonder for future study, to what extent does the need to have a compartmentalized toolbox of strategies (especially amongst the dominant culture) come from the fact that teacher transformation includes the awareness of one’s role in educational reproduction, and thus, part of the constant work includes the need for constant reminding (not requiring this from others across difference)? In other words, I suggest that this level of practice may be a natural, automatic response to the awareness that our actions - when unexamined and unintentional – automatically stem from and reinforce our hegemonic roots. Teacher-participants they soon realized that awareness alone was not enough for transformation. Rather, they considered that awareness was necessary SO THAT they could evolve – ultimately, their very “way of being” (Pat, Teacher-Participant).

One teacher-participant, recently pregnant, pondering the new meaning the group was making about Transformed Teachers as a way of being, seemed to unearth a deeper challenge to her mental model given her new condition:

Are transformed teachers ones that know their job is their life and they throw themselves into it like a soldier at war or are they the ones who have figured out how to balance? ...I wonder how becoming a mom will affect my view on all of this. I hope it gives me a deeper sense of urgency and doesn't cause me to distance myself from the job and students. (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant)

In contrast, the notion of "way of being" seemed more internalized and less of a choice for the teachers of color – requiring less commitment than their white colleagues; Diego reflects, "I think even though I've been in the classroom for 15 or 16 years, pretty much that happens to me on a daily basis. I'm shifting my very being." Obviously these teachers have something the white teachers do not, more shared experiences with our least reached students – at the very least due to the visibility of their skin color and thus, when considering their students of color, do so from an insider's perspective. Simply put, they do not separate themselves or their experiences from their students as much as white teachers. Maya states that she brings to the classroom her full self, "in other words, I do not compartmentalize my personal life from my professional. I cannot separate myself from what I do; they are one and the same"; while Diego made the connection to students more explicit, "when you realize that you want more for your students than what you had or what society and the educational system has historically given them, you begin the process of transforming."

While teacher-participants were clear that transformation requires a deep level of awareness, they also knew it required a commitment to actions that almost certainly will lead to relinquishing the assurance of one's power and status. Such selflessness requires an almost courage, or as Ben suggests "the transformed teacher is fearless in her examination of her role in the process and how and where she can change the oppressive forces for her students that they can be their ultimate selves." Putting one's students and

student results ahead of oneself and one's own personal and familial progress may be the most courageous indicator of transcending our hegemonic roots. That may be why familial progress comes much more naturally for teachers who have some level of connection and common experience than for those who are in and benefit from maintaining a dominant culture.

I want my students to be successful so they can make it through and meet our expectations, but I don't want them just to be funneling information into their head. So a lot of what I set my students up for and prepare them for goes against who I am. I was quiet, I didn't speak up and I want my students to speak up. I want them to ask questions. I want them to have experiences with adults where they're interacting with adults and creating change and that was not my experience at all. (Diego, Teacher-Participant)

Furthermore, that may be why teachers from our dominant culture have at least some different, if not more work to do towards this goal. Coming from a culture that attributes success to individuals "working hard" and "pulling themselves up from their bootstraps" regardless of historic conditions, white teachers may need a level of humility that could feel paradoxical if not contradictory to the internalized value of confidence that is embedded in the language and values of the dominant culture. Pink suggests that the confidence needed by Transformed Teachers may be "the confidence to live in a more uncomfortable space."

This conclusion is less of an evaluative statement than it is a description to better inform potential implications for our work. Even the white teachers in this study moved back and forth between reflections of awareness vs. a way of being, and they seemed to negotiate constantly between those values internalized through their place in a system that benefited them by default and their espoused values to have a transformative impact

on that same system. By simply being provoked with constant prompts, prodding and challenges (by me as well as each other as discourse and relationship deepened), these same teachers who only a few hours earlier happily expressed a sense of worthiness at being nominated as Transformed Teachers, now were demonstrated a deeper level of courage and humility publicly. Cris was now struggling, at least with the word, “transformed,” to me, the word speaks to being radically different from the way I was before. I don’t feel transformed; however, I definitely feel like I’ve evolved, both personally and as an educator.” Lizzie saw the power in her awareness that she is far from completely transformed, “not everyone started as naïve as me. My transformation has the potential to be great because I started with so much to learn.”

### **Cycle III: transforming today and tomorrow’s teachers (extension stage).**

*What does it take for a teacher to transcend the destiny of their hegemonic roots?*

- What transformative experiences or conditions have led to you being where you are in your journey to transform and transcend?
- What obstacles have you face and had to overcome in your journey to transform and transcend?
- What conditions and experiences will be required to assure “Transformed Teachers” for our students?

In the final round of the reflective writing and working retreat, teacher-participants engaged in a final protocol – Chalk Talk – to begin to reflect on the conditions that supported or obstructed their own transformations. It was intended that

this work would result in an opportunity for teacher-participants to engage in, at least an initial stage of synthesis and to make preliminary recommendations related to these conditions and experiences needed to assure Transformed Teachers for our students. As the first part of the day was filled with intense and rich discourse, there was little time left for this final round of work. Still, what surfaced from the Chalk Talk and the brief reflection that followed served as sound grounding for the implications and final recommendations of this study.

In the final round of the reflective writing and working retreat, teacher-participants engaged in one last activity – the Chalk Talk Protocol (see Appendix G) – to begin to reflect on the conditions that supported or obstructed their own transformations. This work was intended to lead to another round of discussion and result in an opportunity for teacher-participants to engage in, at least an initial stage of synthesis and to make preliminary recommendations related to these conditions and experiences needed to assure Transformed Teachers for our students. As the first part of the day was filled with intense and rich discourse, there was little time left for this final round of work. Still, what surfaced from the Chalk Talk and the brief reflection that followed served as sound grounding for the implications and final recommendations of this study.

The Chalk Talk Protocol is a silent activity intended to encourage diverse voices through written and anonymous exchanges on a poster. For this Chalk Talk, the beginning prompt was, *“What does it take for a teacher to transcend the destiny of her/his hegemonic roots?”* Upon completion, teacher-participants had written a total of 42 statements in response to this prompt and in response to each others’ written words (see Appendix H: Transcribed Chalk Talk.) From the 42 statements, I identified 12 mini-discussions or clusters of comments that related to and interacted with each other. From these 12 clusters, I identified four emergent themes, which expectedly have share some

commonalities with themes that emerged during other parts of the reflective writing and working retreat:

- Theme 1: Will (across four of the 12 clusters and 16 of the 42 comments)
- Theme 2: Inquiry and Reflection (across nine of the 12 clusters and 16 of the 42 comments)
- Theme 3: Collaboration (across eleven of the 12 clusters and 22 of the 42 comments)
- Theme 4: Action and Commitment (across eight of the 12 clusters and 16 of the 42 comments)

*“We need to have the willingness in our selves to take up the work to interrupt our current system.”* (Chalk Talk Comment)

The first theme was that of will. Teacher-participants frequently (more than one-third of the comments) referenced the necessity for teachers to believe change is possible and needed, and the commitment do what it takes for that change to occur - including seemingly simplistic work such as “to listen” to and “to hear” others.

Teacher-participants reinforced commonly held beliefs that teachers must “desire to understand others who may be very different than yourself and whom we have been programmed to be prejudiced against” as a way transform their expectations for “others” and thus – ultimately believe that success and excellence is possible for their least reached students. Teacher-participants stated, however, that teachers must begin this work first by looking to themselves and their own hegemonic roles. “We must realize that this does not have to be our destiny. There are other paths” and “we can be empowered to be agents of change and transformation.”

Perhaps, however, the biggest shift of thinking proposed by teacher-participants surfaced in the moment one teacher-participants wrote question, “If you’re not willing, should you be allowed to stay in this job? Should this be left to choice?”

While this question captured some of the conversation prior to the Chalk Talk, its being offered in simple writing created a loud silence in the group as teacher-participants just stood, nodding their heads they blinked slowly and breathed deeply.

*“Reflection is essential.” (Chalk Talk Comment)*

The second theme was that of inquiry and reflection. Teacher-participants cited that it will take teachers developing a meta-cognitive knowledge base about who they are, who their students are, and what the system is in order “to understand that there even are hegemonic roots” and “that these roots are located in white supremacy”. Teacher-participants cited a variety of means to support such reflective practice (starting with listening and hearing as previously referenced), including formal collaborative structures such as study groups and “EBCFG” (Equity-Based Critical Friends Groups). While these structures can be used in a variety of contexts, what was less open was their foci which included specifically “Freire study groups” and opportunities “to explore and do some reflective work around race and power... and then later how that might play out/ impact a classroom”.

*“This work should be done w/ others.” (Chalk Talk Comment)*

Collaboration was the third theme that emerged for these teacher-participants. They contended not only that Transformed Teachers require “exposure to what successful teaching - transformative teaching - looks like, sounds like, feels like”, but also that the

work needed to be ongoing, specific and strategic: “Teachers should observe others for long stretches of time (specifically other teachers w/ similar backgrounds who are further in this work)”. Teacher-participants recognized that this work is necessary in the face of current conditions that support further reproduction of the status quo: “There will be lots of times when the system wants you to de-volve or slip. Therefore, a person needs to have others that can remind him of who he is or explain that she is not alone in this work of social justice”. The call for this work to continue and sustain can be supported by structures such as EB CFGs, mentoring, observations, and study groups to help develop communities of allies who are willing to push each other.

While none of these alone is a new idea, teacher-participants noted a sense of urgency – if not responsibility to ensure deep levels of collaboration that, again, are ongoing, specific and strategic: “I think that some people can do it alone, but that again is kind of selfish - kind of saying that this year, in this class, you will have a transformative experience - after that, I'm not sure”.

*“More than a desire - this requires action and stepping into the unknown and uncomfortable.”* (Chalk Talk Comment)

Teacher-participants demonstrated a clear collective agreement that whatever reflective work Transformative Teachers needed to do for themselves or collaborative work with others in affinity or across difference, it had to connect to and come with a commitment to action – the final emergent theme. More than action alone, the urgency of our current situation requires the action to be immediate, ongoing and simultaneous to the work we need to transform ourselves. While some of the action is actually the work we must do on ourselves in relation to our race and power, or with others (EB CFGs,

mentoring, etc.), action had to come back to and impact the changes we must make with and for the students we have in front of us. One teacher-participant was very specific about this, stating the need to be fearless “to understand and build relationships - we can't be afraid of our black students”.

### *On Sequence*

While there was not a prescriptive sequence explicitly delineated by teacher-participants, a couple of tensions arose in relation to “when” different work needs to occur. On the one hand, teacher-participants were clear that change and action are needed now, but it was widely held that the personal and collaborative work was necessary to truly transform our beliefs, expectations, actions, reactions and ultimately our results. Even within this preparatory work, teachers of color expressed (and white teachers agreed) that white teachers usually (and some times, teachers of color) need to do their own internal work prior to collaborating across difference. So even though urgency requires us to be fully engaged at all levels, there seems to be innate to this work some embedded benchmarks – guided by critical consciousness - that we need to reach before fully engaging others as we move our transformative work from ourselves to our peers to our students. While this supports my own supposition that true sustained transformation only occurs once individual transformation occurs (or begins as transformation is continual), it removes the linear thinking behind the model and invites one of transformational cycles.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations**

As stated in the definition offered earlier in this study,

*“The Transformed Teachers is the educator who has transcended the prejudicial and oppressive beliefs, values and expectations - as well as the resulting practices - that seem to be instilled in the very DNA of our public education system and ultimately sustained through a highly effective, reproductive cycle implicating our educators as individuals who have successfully navigated and therefore benefitted from the system they are charged with interrupting.”*

Findings from this study are sufficient to provide answers the research question, “***How are teachers, as products of a hegemonic school system, transformed to transcend their reproductive role within the same system to that they can successfully educate our traditionally least reached youth?***” While I anticipated the data might identify unique experiences that were catalytic in transforming teachers to transcend their hegemonic destiny in public education, I actually found the data to surface a set of conditions that surrounded multiple experiences over a span of time that served as catalysts for the teacher-participants’ self-identified transformations (at whatever stage they identified.) I have categorized my findings into four major conclusions, which unsurprisingly overlap:

1. Transformed Teachers continuously **develop their awareness**.
2. Transformed Teachers are committed to rigorous **inquiry, reflection and discourse**.

3. Transformed Teachers engage in relationships with **mentors and role models**.
4. Transformed Teachers share their own and listen to others' **diverse stories**.

As a result of my findings, I identified a set of conditions that are necessary for teacher transformation. Some of these conditions are not within the control our educational system, but may be influenced and supported by our educational system and thus will be listed as implications. The other set of conditions that can support teacher transformation fall within the control our educational system to provide and ensure and will be shared as recommendations.

## **Conclusions**

*“...understand that there even are hegemonic roots... And that these roots are located in white supremacy.”* (Chalk Talk Exchange)

1. Transformed Teachers continuously **develop their awareness** of our educational system, themselves and others, in the skin they are in, and in relation to each other. This work often is distressful if not painful and requires ongoing healing to ensure intelligent decisions and actions. One of the initial findings that came both from teacher and student participants was the level of awareness – and factual knowledge – transformative teachers had about the system educational system, its hegemonic roots and its impact on schools today. Knowledge includes current and alternative theory, literature and research; this latter matter includes knowledge of diverse cultures and their educational history and values.

*“We need to reflect on personal, formative experiences.”* (Chalk Talk Comment)

2. Transformed Teachers are committed to rigorous **inquiry, reflection and discourse** - professionally AND personally, sometimes alone - or in (racial) affinity, and sometimes across difference. Guided by inquiry and a stance around equity and social justice, transformation requires teachers to be fierce about constantly interrogating how who they are – in the skin they are in – plays out every day in and out of the classroom. Beyond knowing “*that there even are hegemonic roots,*” transformation requires teachers to know their own hegemonic roots. This reflection stretches the transformed teachers’ knowledge beyond the cognitive work of research and literature and includes the non-optional, deep work and learning about self, system, students and the relationships between all these players as informed by power and status of demographics.

*“There will be lots of times when the system wants you to de-volve or slip. Therefore, a person needs to have others that can remind him of who he is or explain that she is not alone in this work of social justice.”* (Chalk Talk Comment)

Transformed Teachers formally and willingly engage in relationships with **mentors, role models** (and sometimes literature) for the benefit of informing and influencing their mental models and perspectives beyond that of their own limited, experiences. The strong sentiment behind the way different work can and should be done with different colleagues supports a “both-and-and” conclusion. While some of the work Transformed Teachers need to do to occurs across difference, and some within affinity groups, all this work can be supported and accelerated with formal mentor relationships. Change and action are needed now, and personal and collaborative work is needed to truly transform our beliefs, expectations, actions, reactions and results. Even though

urgency requires us to be fully engaged at all levels, there seems to be innate to this work some embedded benchmarks – guided by critical consciousness - that we need to reach before fully engaging others as we move our transformative work from ourselves to our peers to our students. The power of formal mentor relationships is that the mentor has a responsibility to the transforming teacher and thus can minimize the impact of these considerations and removes the temptation for linear thinking and invites us to consider a model of transformational cycles. In addition, literature by those similar and dissimilar to us, can serve as additional perspectives for when teachers are on their transformational journeys – especially for those who may not have the colleagues or mentors (or relationships), particularly across difference, to support their individual work.

*"I think there's interesting balance between inner work and things that are done alone and then things that are done in community and those kind of seem to overlap or sometimes they're very separate as well."* (Lizzie, Teacher-Participant)

3. Liberation and transformation requires Transformed Teachers to collaborate and share their own - and listen to others' **diverse stories**, for shared meaning making, and in support of the first three conclusions. Teacher-participants found collaboration to be integral to transformation – but not just any collaboration. They contended that Transformed Teachers require "*exposure to what successful teaching - transformative teaching - looks like, sounds like, feels like,*" and also must engage in collaborative specific, ongoing and strategic work for re-creating successful classrooms: "*Teachers should observe others for long stretches of time (specifically other teachers w/ similar backgrounds who are further in this work).*"

## Implications

The implications that surface from my findings suggest a set of conditions necessary for teacher transformation. This study suggests that teacher transformation requires a critically minimum level of **Will, Commitment, and Emotional Intelligence** – specifically as they relate to the transformation process. Because these conditions are difficult – at best – to assess and thus assure, they may be considered with a secondary or tertiary priority – but should not be ignored.

*“I think there’s a difference though, between having a desire or willingness to be a teacher and to have a desire and willingness to be a teacher that interrupts the current system.”* (Cris, Teacher-Participant)

## Will To Do What It Takes

Teachers need to believe that system change is possible and needed, and must desire doing whatever it takes for that change to occur - including for work that might seem simplistic at first, such as “*to listen to*” and “*to hear*” others’ stories and experiences in contrast and as a challenge to their own. Teachers’ values and beliefs influence their expectations, output and results as they suggested. As a transformative teacher, one must “...desire to understand others who may be very different than yourself and whom we have been programmed to be prejudiced against” (Chalk Talk Comment). This understanding is necessary to transform the expectations teachers have of those who are different and thus – ultimately the belief that success and excellence is possible even for their least reached students. Teacher-participants also stated however, that teachers must be willing to start this work first by looking to themselves and their own hegemonic

roles. Teachers “must realize that this does not have to be our destiny. There are other paths” and “we can be” (Chalk Talk Comments).

*“More than a desire - this requires action and stepping into the unknown and uncomfortable.” – Teacher-Participant Quote*

### **Commitment To Work and Act – Even When Unsure**

Will alone is not enough. Teacher transformation requires a commitment to action. More than action alone, the urgency of our current situation requires immediate and ongoing action related to our own work towards transforming ourselves simultaneous to transformative action with and for our students’ experiences and results. While action may look different from teacher to teacher, actions should be clear, explicit and transparent enough, for in the absence of individual action, community action (support, intervention, accountability, etc.) may be needed.

*“We’re not seen people; we are seen as ‘blacks’ in the connotation of ‘what it means to be black is not human’... I think a lot of people though would say, ‘Yeah, I see them as humans’. But I think there’s more processing.” (Maya, Teacher-Participant)*

### **Emotional Intelligence to Heal and Re-Humanize Self and Others**

All teachers suffer from the internalized and systematized oppression that results from being part of our educational system, and to some extent, all teachers need to engage in a minimum level healing before taking charge of our youth’s educational lives. Connecting our own history to daily practices may surface (or resurface) painful

memories and new revelations. Teachers of color must overcome the impact of Stereotype Threat on their own lives so that they can serve as mentors, and white teachers must do similar work to overcome the obstacles not only that pertain to serving as an arm of systemic oppression through low expectations for students across difference, but also to heal and overcome the emotional distress that comes from the guilt and pain that arises when acknowledging their role in this work. Even though schools must become places where affective release and healing can occur as it relates to our least successful efforts, individuals must walk into the profession with a certain level of stability and emotional intelligence or “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990) in order to navigate, healthfully, this healing process and insist on humanizing experiences for themselves, each other and their students more intelligent and effective decisions and actions as educators bequeathed with the care of our youth.

Whether in our realm of control or merely a sphere of influence, the collective findings surfaced that the experiences that served as catalysts for transformation were not solitary moments in time as much as they were a series of events within a set of conditions. My recommendations focus on the system that can help require and foster the conditions to allow for more transformational experiences amongst teachers. Specifically, I will start with teacher education programs and move to the schools and districts themselves.

## **Recommendations**

*“How can I be in-charge of a classroom? At like this stage in my development? I should be teamed up with another... better teacher... ”* (Cris, Teacher-Participant quoting student teacher)

### **Schools of Education**

My first recommendation is for schools of education to become more rigorous in their screening, support and progressing students based not only on academic knowledge but also affective development in working with themselves, their peers and students across difference.

#### **Screening Through a Rigorous and Intentional Application and Acceptance Process**

Schools of education should include as part of their application process and acceptance criteria clear communication of the expectation for candidates to engage in personal transformation work during their academic career – and as a criterion for credentialing. While it can not be expected that candidates already understand or have demonstrated a level of transformation, candidates should be evaluated against some criteria to demonstrate a minimum level of awareness and willingness to engage in the work described in any school’s stated expectations. This more rigorous screening process can serve as a level of permission to interrupt hegemonic patterns as they surface within the actual academic program – prior to credentialing.

#### **Academic Program Prioritizing Affective As Well As Cognitive Development**

Additionally, schools of education should develop their programs to allow students to study and engage in this work both from the cognitive and affective domains. As much as teachers need to know their content areas, today's teachers need to face and interrogate their own histories and hegemonic roles in our educational system BEFORE being fully responsible for classes of students. As a result, healing work will need to occur for teachers to be more effective with students across difference; even though this work on one's self must be continuous, it needs to start – and to take root - prior to teachers having their own classrooms.

There actually is no shortage of strategies and curricula to support this change; schools of education would simply need to explore where the work currently occurs – all too often for teachers already in the classroom. Some of the structures and strategies mentioned by teacher-participants include Equity-Based Critical Friends' Groups, Freire Study Groups, peer observations, Affinity Groups, and developing alliances by intentionally working across difference. Another strategy that played a pivotal role in the transformative experiences of almost every teacher-participant was that of a mentor; I recommend schools of education explicitly develop a mentor strategy beyond the current role of the master teacher, whose role seems to support the current focus on cognitive and practical development.

### **Progress Towards Teacher Credential**

Finally, it is recommended that schools of education take seriously enough the essential component of transformational development that it could make the difference of a teacher candidate getting or not getting her credential. In the same way that candidates needed to demonstrate a base level of awareness and willingness to enroll, these same candidates need to demonstrate and defend a new level of competence not only in these

areas but also in their Emotional Intelligence or capacity as well as their effectiveness to sustain their transformation through their commitment to continuously deepen their study, reflection and actions – alone and in collaboration – for the purpose of improving their practice and student results. Ultimately, our teacher training programs should model teacher transformation that is expected by being willing and committed to support the transformation of their own teacher candidates, and not afraid to interrupt hegemonic patterns including if that interruption is not progressing teacher candidates who demonstrate a need to continue to work on themselves first.

*This is a profession. You don't enter this... you shouldn't enter this job if you don't have a willingness to do that or desire to get to know your students. That's baseline... (Lizzie,*

Teacher-Participant)

## Schools and Districts

Because the need is immediate and urgent, simultaneously to fostering teacher transformation during their own education, our schools and districts must become more rigorous in their parallel cycle of hiring, supporting and evaluating teachers, but now with the more rigorous expectation and standard of providing an effective and equitable education to actual students. (Sadly, I don't soon foresee a complete enough reconstruction of our educational system to remove this simultaneous need.)

## Hiring Prioritizing Clear and Explicit Expectations About Equity and Social Justice

While teacher education programs needed to prioritize candidates' willingness to work on themselves, schools must assess not only the same in teacher candidates, but also their readiness to externalize their work by focusing on the ultimate goal of equity and

social justice for their students. Because inequities may differ slightly from one school context to another, specific questions and screening tactics should differ slightly; however, schools and districts should begin modeling the difficult and courageous conversations expected of their teachers in the interview. Beyond standard questions about curriculum and pedagogy, schools should name and discuss race and power dynamics for students. Schools should expect applicants to come prepared to share and discuss results they have had with students across difference as well as to explore very specific scenarios through anecdotes and role plays. Ultimately, a contract offered should equate to the statement, “you have demonstrated yourself worthy of caring for our previously, least-reached students.” Because of the reality of hiring, anything less than this standard should result in a contract being offered with an explicit support plan.

### **Professional Development Focused on Results Driven Collaboration and Improvement**

The understated reality of teaching is that it is a difficult, difficult job. The lack of supportive conditions – or worse, the prevalence of historically destructive conditions – negatively impact the results for even the most willing, committed and emotionally intelligent teacher. Schools need to prioritize professional development needed for continuous and sustained teacher transformation – and the related transformative experiences for students. Given the many specific models for professional development programs, the program may be less important than the resulting culture – one that is clearly committed to results based inquiry, reflection, difficult discourse and action oriented collaboration. Again, will require teachers to extend beyond the cognitive domain to include affective and healing work as they explore the actual results of their pedagogy and actions on students across demographics, as they listen to each others’

stories and perspectives as it relates to the school experience, and as they engage in challenging discussions with peers (and by extension, supervisors, students and families) intended to interrupt hegemonic patterns and sustain transformative ones. Ultimately, schools must become professional learning communities where it is not only the students who are expected to work and learn.

### **Teacher Evaluation Supporting Courageous and Honest Actions**

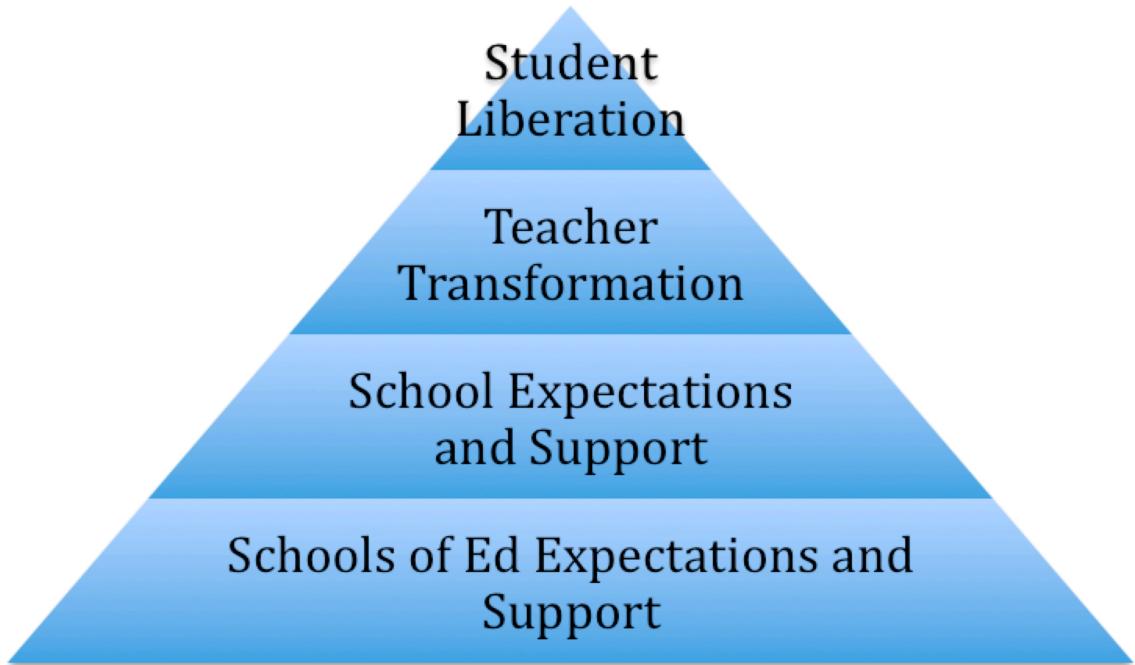
Schools need to be places where the notion of evaluation is as constructive and purposeful as we espouse them to be for our students – especially when teachers are the ones who have elected to take responsibility to educate our youth (as difficult as the work is). Thus, teacher evaluation should become more meaningful and rigorous – especially if leveraged by a supportive professional development program (amongst other supportive conditions) as described above. Teachers should be evaluated based on both progress and results, their valuations supported by and further influencing discourse not only about their knowledge and pedagogy, but also about their transformational progress in the context of their results.

This work is challenged not only by the notion that our schools have focused so much on the cognitive domain, but also by the fact that no individual is ever complete with their transformational journey. For this reason, the very evaluation process should be re-imagined. With clear and rigorous expectations, this work can occur with the teacher's learning at the center. Given the other supportive conditions, we should foster cultures where teachers care enough about their results and the related inequities that they can lead the process for deep reflection, discourse, action and improvement through a self-assessment that is informed by data, student and adult feedback – and in turn informs next steps for them as teachers. Driven by the teacher herself, difficult conversations

about next steps whether it be about continuing and sharing effective practices (to include serving as mentor for new teachers), or establishing improvement plans, or considering a new career.

Ultimately, I hypothesize that if we accept the need for, prioritize and integrate transformation at the critical junctures of teacher development, we will develop a solid foundation, ultimately for student transformation – and liberation.

Figure 3. Teacher Transformation and Student Liberation



## **Limitations**

I recognize that this study comes with limitations. Because I intend to study stories, characteristics, conditions and experiences related to those teachers deemed “transformed”; this study will not consider the variables of those not identified as “transformed,” thus leaving out potentially important data. Additionally, the very Transformed Teachers I intend to study will be a sample that is established by a standard established mostly by me. Even though I intend to use appropriate precautions to identify this sample, including student and school leader input as well as student achievement data, to determine the characteristics and names of potential Transformed Teachers, the process ultimately will leave out teachers worth studying who may be “transformed” by other standards, thus omitting equally important information. Finally, it is important to note that because each of the teachers being selected comes from a school that is within the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools network, this study may have a limited level of “generalizability” as the teachers and their related experiences may be influenced by this common variable in ways that do not apply broadly across other contexts.

This study makes no assumption of whether or not transformation is possible for some; rather it suggests that transformation is necessary for all teachers. The journey may and should look somewhat different for different teachers based on the skin they are in, however, the standard of progress should be considered prior to entering the classroom. At the very minimum, transformation should not be optional.

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**Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Liberation Theory: A Working Framework**

1. Liberation is both the undoing of the effects and the elimination of the causes of social oppression. The achievement of human liberation on a global scale will require far-reaching changes at the institutional level and at the level of group and individual interactions. These changes will involve transforming oppressive behavioral patterns and "unlearning" oppressive attitudes and assumptions.
2. No one is naturally or genetically oppressive; no human being is born as an oppressor. No one is naturally or genetically destined to be oppressed; no one is born to be oppressed.
3. Oppression is the systematic and pervasive mistreatment of individuals on the basis of their membership in various groups, which are disadvantaged by the institutionalized imbalances in social power in a particular society. Oppression includes both institutionalized or "normalized" mistreatment as well as instances of violence. It includes the invalidation, denial, or the non-recognition of the complete humanness (the goodness, uniqueness, smartness, powerfulness, etc.) of those who are members of the mistreated group.
4. Biological/cultural/ethnic/sexual/religious/age differences between human beings are never the cause of oppression. The use of these differences to explain either why certain groups of people are oppressed (or) why certain groups of people behave oppressively, functions as a justification of oppression.
5. Differences in class, in social and economic power, in educational opportunity and achievement, in health and physical well being, are the expression and result of institutionalized inequalities in opportunity. Such differences perpetuate and increase the social imbalances in power and thereby serve to maintain all forms of oppression.
6. The perpetuation of oppression is made possible by the conditioning of new generations of human beings into the role of being oppressed and the role of being oppressive. In a society in which there is oppression, everyone (at one time or another) is socialized into both of these roles. People who are the target group of a particular form of mistreatment are socialized to become victims; people who are the non-target group of a particular form of mistreatment are socialized to become perpetrators either in a direct, active form or in an indirect, passive form. Neither of these roles serves our best interests as human beings.
7. The conditioning of both groups, the target group and the non-target group of any given oppression takes place through a specific form of oppression, the oppression of young people. In a society in which there is oppression, all young people will be the targets of this systematic mistreatment, i.e. all young people will be oppressed.
8. In addition to force and the threat of force, oppression is perpetuated through the generation and recycling of systematic misinformation about the nature, history, and the abilities of the target group. -Because this misinformation is socially empowered

and sanctioned, it functions as the justification for the continued mistreatment of the target group.

9. Each group targeted by oppression inevitably "internalizes" the mistreatment and the misinformation about itself. The target group thus "mis-believes" about itself the same misinformation which pervades the social system. This "mis-believing" expresses itself in behavior and interactions between individual members of the target group which repeat the content of their oppression. Internalized oppression is always an involuntary reaction to the experience of oppression on the part of the target group.) To blame the target group in any way for having internalized the consequences of their oppression is itself an act of oppression.
10. The "positive re-enforcements" and social rewards that people in a non-target group receive for going along with their conditioning would not in themselves be sufficient to secure their acceptance of the social role of the perpetrator. The "acceptance" of this role is first made possible as a result of the individual's own experience of oppression, originally as a young person.
11. People who are the targets of any particular form of oppression have resisted and attempted to resist their oppression in any way they could. The fact that their resistance is not generally recognized is itself a feature of the oppression.
12. People who are the non-target of any particular oppression have resisted and attempted to resist their socialization into the oppressive role. The fact that this resistance is not generally recognized is also a feature of the oppression.
13. Being socialized into the oppressed role is a painful experience for all people of the target group. Being socialized into the oppressor role is a painful experience for all people of the non-target group --- in spite of the positive re-enforcements and material benefits that go along with this role.
14. Part of the conditioning experience is the misinformation that socialization into these roles is not painful. In some cases the pain of the conditioning is recognized for people in the target group. It is seldom recognized for people of the non-target group. The conditioning experiences are portrayed as "a normal part of growing up." For the most part the original awareness that this socialization was painful is obscured, or forgotten.
15. The perpetuation of any particular oppression requires that the pain of being socialized into either the oppressed or the oppressor role be forgotten, or discounted. The discounting or "normalizing" of the painful aspects of the conditioning process thus becomes a means of perpetuating all forms of oppression.
16. Liberation is possible. It is possible to recover the buried memories of our socialization, to share our stories and heal the hurts imposed by the conditioning, to act in the present in a humane and caring manner, to rebuild our human connections and to change our world.

## Appendix B: Reflective Writing and Working Retreat Agenda

*Transformed Teacher Writing Retreat*

*June 24, 2011*

### Opening Moves (~15')

- Logistics: Breakfast and Lunch
- Agenda Review
- Research Review (see PPT)
- Initial Reflection (see reflection sheet) – Who are you (self-identified demographics) and who do you want to be (alter ego / research pseudonym)

### Cycle I: Describe – Student Quotes about Transformative Teachers (~115')

- Block Party
- Audio Taped Socratic: *What would these students say make for a transformative teacher?*
- Hypothesis A: *Teachers who create transformative experiences for their students may have experienced transformative experiences themselves*
- Written Reflection Cycle (Writing, Sharing Trios - Numbers, Writing)
  - *Describe the dimensions of a transformative teacher.*
  - *How do you feel about being nominated as a teacher who has transformed students' experiences?*
  - *Why do you think you were nominated as a teacher who has contributed to the transformative experiences of students?*

### Cycle II: Personalize – The Transformed Teacher (~100')

- Audio Taped: Text Rendering
- Hypothesis B: *"Transformed Teachers" who have transcended the intended role of reproduction create transformative experiences for their students*
- Written Reflection Cycle (Writing, Sharing Trios - Colors, Writing)
  - *What constitutes being transformed and transcended? What does it look like?*

- *What has/ does being transformed and transcended looked like for you?*
- *Given that you have been nominated as a teacher who has contributed to transformative experiences for students, do you agree you that this is a result, in part, of your own transformation? If you agree – describe the pre-transformed you and the post-transformed you (what did you transform from, to?). If not, say more.*

**Lunch** ( $\sim 45'$ )

### **Cycle III: Extend – Transforming Today's and Tomorrow's Teachers ( $\sim 80'$ )**

- Chalk Talk and Audio Taped Debrief: *What does it take for a teacher to transcend the destiny of their hegemonic roots?*
- Written Reflection Cycle (Writing, Sharing Trios - Letters, Writing)
  - *What transformative experiences or conditions have led to you being where you are in your journey to transform and transcend?*
  - *What obstacles have you face and had to overcome in your journey to transform and transcend?*
  - *What conditions and experiences will be required to assure “Transformed Teachers” for our students?*

**Closing Moves** ( $\sim 5'$ )

- Appreciations
- Gift Cards

## Appendix C: Student Focus Group Pre-Election Sheet

**Thank you for returning your consent sheet(s)!**

I am looking forward to seeing you in the focus group to be held on May \_\_\_\_\_, from \_\_\_\_\_ pm to \_\_\_\_\_ pm at your school in room \_\_\_\_\_.

Prior to the focus group, please complete the following tasks:

1. Please take care and provide complete responses to the following prompts:

- **Name:**

*(An anonymous code will be assigned to identify you.)*

- **Age:**
- **Gender:**
- **Grade:**

- How do you self-identify your

- **Race:**
- **Ethnicity:**

- **Language(s)** spoken at home:

- In 2-3 sentences describe **what kind of student you think you are** – and why.

2. **Take and bring 3-5 pictures** that represent a transformative learning experience for you (*a transformational learning moment is a time when you experienced learning in a different and powerful manner that potentially helped you to succeed at a time when you normally might not have succeeded*). Pictures can be of places, things, events, people, student work, or even symbols. (Don't worry, no pictures with identifiable people will be published.) For each picture, use the included **index cards to write 3-5 sentences** to:

**A) Describe the picture, and B) describe your transformational learning experience and why you chose this photograph to represent it.**

*If you do not have a camera, I will provide one and develop the pictures prior to the focus group.*

**Appendix D: Teacher Pre-flection Sheet**

- What is your name?
- Optional: What anonymous pseudonym would you like?
- How many years have you been teaching?
- What is your current position?
- How do you self-identify your
  - Gender:
  - Race:
  - Ethnicity:
- What language(s) is/are spoken at home?
- In 2-3 sentences describe what kind of teacher you think you are – and why.
  
- In 2-3 sentences state why you became a teacher.

## Appendix E: Student Focus Group Agenda

### Into (30')

- Welcome/ Agenda Review (~5 minutes)

After students introduce themselves, I will review with students what a focus group is and the purpose of this focus group. Additionally, I will review the permission that is required, the fact that the focus group will be audio taped, and remind them that they may cease participation at any time with no repercussions.

- Review of Student Photographs (~25 minutes)

- Go-Round: *What pictures did you bring and why?*
- Open Discussion: *What patterns did we notice? What else is worth noting?*
- Written Reflection: *What kind of teachers are able to provide you or others these transformative learning experiences?* (To be collected.)

### Through (45')

- Transformed Teacher (~45')

PowerPoint to describe research and definition of Transformed Teacher

Open Discussion and Probing Questions as Needed

I will remind students to try and talk one at a time and to try and say their names before talking in order to help facilitate appropriate identification within the audiotape.

- Who are the teachers that have had the greatest and most positive impact on your success? (Name the teachers and then describe them.)
- Why do you think these teachers are who they are - how do you think teachers get to be this kind of teacher?

### Beyond (25')

- Chalk Talk (~20')

*What do you think it would take to make any teacher effective for you? (Potential follow-up question: "How would your answer change if you were a different student?")*

- Closing Remarks/ Appreciations (~5')

*During this time, I will review next steps in the process, appreciate students and their input (including a reflection on the potential for students of transformed teacher to become transformed themselves) and distribute \$10.00 gift cards for a local bookstore to each student.*

## Appendix F: Student Focus Group Quotes

1. *"I, actually, think that is true, that teachers are taught to base...to judge students when they first see them... Kind of like...let's say, in the beginning of the school year, you're walking in the classroom, your teacher will be okay and then someone walks in that, let's say they're Black or something and then...I don't know... Some teachers will kind of be with a cautious approach. Kind of just watching them and how they act, or some teachers will just judge them and just separate them or something."*
2. *"I think that still applies to what we also learned in class with equity and equality where the government tries to give equality. Equality means giving the same amount of things on both schools even though they see that one school has thousands of kids and the other one has probably just a little. That's where I guess that involves because they see more as equality than equity, which means giving more to whoever needs it."*
3. *"She is a lawyer. She is part of the system."*
4. *"...my critical thinking was already deep, but she made it go to another extent; I didn't know it could go that far. She has a way with words. She tells you where she's supposed to teach but in her words you understand like fight for what you want. She gives inspiration. Even if she doesn't talk about how the system works but just everyday coming to her classroom and her saying, 'Good morning' and having a smile on her face. It makes you know that she cares about you. She cares about your education because she has never given up on us. Even when we were bad in her class and she had to yell at us. She always cared about us."*
5. *"If I feel if you could be understanding and connect yourself to somebody else's problem or somebody else's struggle that that could push you to changing yourself in your community and just in the world. If you could be understanding and know someone else you will never really know, just feel for them... That can influence you to become a part of you and it'll influence you to make change and take action and what happens."*

6. “Also, I think it has to do with how passionate they are about their work. They’re passionate...change students because I think if you’re going to work in the school to make a change in them, not just make them graduate. Even if they don’t graduate, you know that you’ve made a change in somebody’s life.”
7. “...she just respects you for who you are. Like this is what you bring, she wants you to do even better. So, I mean, yeah, you’re passing but she’ll push you to go even a grade higher.”
8. “I think it has to do with books. I guess, in my opinion, it doesn’t matter the age or the struggles and knowledge, it matters about the knowledge because some of the teachers I nominated, they told me my life wasn’t as hard as yours. I didn’t have to go through half of the things you went through, like I had everything. They told me I had everything. But it’s about the books because the books open your mind to other perspectives of people’s lives. When you read books...I read a lot of books. When you read books, it gives you a feeling of how the people, like you feel for what you’re reading or the struggles that the people are going through. Once you read a lot about all these struggles, it becomes a part of you and it becomes a part of your struggle and who you are.”
9. “It’s just crazy how people are, basically, forced to do something but they don’t notice why and how they are, but that’s what their job is to do. They don’t notice but they just see what they’re teaching and they don’t really look at what the future’s going to be like after teaching that person.”
10. “When I came here for my freshman year, it wasn’t a lot because we were just barely here and we were getting into the school. But at least this year, as a junior, I feel like I really learned a lot and I really got stronger like the way I thought about school and stuff. The way she teaches, she’s shows her passion about justice and about us learning and us being somewhere in this world, like us being treated the same as everybody else. I think she is the one who really changed the way I am now.”
11. “I feel the thing that just makes it...real change is somehow tied to community, just wanting equalness for everyone. If you think about it like probably...if you can think like her or something, if just caring about students’ education didn’t push her,

*imagine if she had a kid or something. She's going to want her kid to be put through this type of education where he or she is not going to have the same help or the same resources as the next kid somewhere else. Even though they might have the same potential and they could both be the president of the United States. It's just about wanting better for your community."*

12. "It's like we try to change the system but we don't change the system. It changes us."
13. "I feel like some students around to school who don't think she is a good teacher. Personally, I think she is an excellent teacher. She knows what she's talking about and she teaches us like she'll go over it with us until we get it. I love that about her. She goes above and beyond what a teacher should do. She's just a good teacher."
14. "My English teacher, he was also my adviser for my first semester of freshmen year. He was coming into high school from middle school where I had like I guess already given up. Not really given up but I wasn't really striving for achieving. I come into his class and he's just a very tough teacher but he's a good teacher. He knew what he was teaching at the same time like he would give you something and expect you to do it. But if you didn't do it, he would help you. That he wouldn't just give up on you. He would always be with you and trying to help you, explaining things to you if you understand it. And he was an intimidating teacher if you didn't know him. Like if you didn't really know him like that, he was kind of scary. Like you wouldn't really want to approach him and ask him a question personally. But once you get to know him and you really get closer to him, he's a really good teacher and a good person."
15. "She is a great teacher. But it's not also about her teaching, like her as a person. She really understands everyone. She doesn't...she's the kind of teacher that she's, basically, not a teacher. She's kind of more as a role model. Like if we're acting up, she won't yell at us like other teachers. She'll probably talk to us, pull us aside or something. ...she's like a mentor. She treats everyone equal. ...so every class this year has been smooth; there's never been any problems and some teachers have favorites, to her, everyone's her favorite. She treats everyone equal. And for me, personally, I've had problems before and then she's always checking in with me like are you doing, are you having trouble? Do you need help? And she's just a great teacher here."

16. "She's equal to everybody... She'll lay everything out first and then have a skeleton of everything and you have to finish it. And it's like I like the way she teaches and how she lays everything out for you to do because it's not hard, it's not easy – it's about the same. And she just...she's so helpful... We all worked together. We all, actually, finished things on time and time managing for her is on point. If she wants to do something, then she's going to do it. And if she has multiple things to do on long block days, she'll get everything done."
17. "She saw me, she's like, 'It's not about who or what your background is. It's about yourself because change starts with yourself.' She made me see that...yeah, I need words of wisdom and she encouraged me. But I was always seeking for it. I didn't do my work if I didn't have the courage and she's like, 'You know, sometimes nobody's going to be there for you. Whose is going to be there? It's yourself.' The words she says and the way she says things, she seems like, 'You're going to choose something in your life. But now matter what, you're always going to have something because if you really want it then you'll have it.'"
18. "I got a mad respect for her because she points a lot of things out where we could do better and how we can better ourselves. But, I mean, yeah, she does have long lectures to give us and like she'll start brainstorming about everything. But it's only...it's for a reason."
19. "And he's my adviser. And he's kind of hard to like...I don't know. Like why are you mad today... but then he'll leave that outside but when he comes to class, he just knows what to say. His words really did inspire me to like get the...especially at the end of the year, I could have done way better but...I don't know. I regret not listening... I did get all my stuff on point with my portfolio, my exhibition but I could have done way better if I just pushed myself. That's the thing about him. He'll keep saying things he'll want you to do. Basically, he wants you to do independent work. It's like he'll lecture you about things and he'll come back and asks you if you did it. If you didn't do it, he's going to be disappointed at you. But he won't quit. He won't quit on you. Like he'll keep telling you to do it and that's what I liked about all of those teachers."

20. "Well, she had a positive impact on my learning. I've had her for English. She told me how to become a stronger writer and I feel good about writing and stuff. So she's definitely had a good influence on me as far as teaching. I'm pretty sure she teaches everyone else, it's just that she teaches me. She does that well."
21. "She would give us lectures in class and tell us how it was in other countries like Central America, and how education is a privilege. For us, as colored, even if the United States is a place of opportunities, it is a privilege for us to have an education. I feel she tries really hard to make us know that our education has value. Not only our education but us, and that we can make a change in mind, like in our society if we work together."
22. "My History teacher... He has a way with words. He teaches the system and how all the presidents acted, the Warsaw Pact and everything. It's like even if he tells it by the book but behind every single one, he has an opinion. Behind every single one, he knows how to relate it to us even if it's not in classroom. But when I'm talking with him like outside of the class, he tells me how I could change the system; I just have to work with my community. Just these little things, he tells me how...I don't know, just little things, he gives me that extra push to not give up on myself and all that. I could be the same as any other white person in another school."
23. "He was my World History teacher and is kind of like a male version of (another teacher). He was just an awesome teacher. He was always in a happy mood and he would always walk into classes smile on his face and that was just brightening up the classroom as well. And also with his... his curriculum, he was a good teacher. His classes were never boring. ...when he would teach or something, like a lecture, he would always have the class involved in it. And he was just a good teacher."
24. "Yeah, he is very inspirational. He's my History teacher, all of us actually. In the beginning of the school year, he would always say, he will say it everyday for us. He would be like, 'People have made sacrifices for you to be here today.' I didn't really started getting that until come the end of this year because we've done assignments like our epic research paper and our civil rights poem, I think. That allowed me to go back in my history, reflect and really think about what my people went through and why I should push extra hard to be the best I could be. When I hear him saying that,

*we understand that what he meant, it was just good. It makes me see how good a teacher he is.”*

25. *“My adviser, she always is talking about how we need to our education like we just need to push ourselves as much as we can because we’re already in a ditch. She’s letting it be known that we need better and we deserve better. Teachers at our school sort of apply to that.”*
26. *“It’s too hard to break that cycle. When it started that far back, we can’t help but to follow in the way that schools came up. It’s almost like we have to follow that structure and design of how the schools are because we can’t just have a whole reconstruction. It’s hard when students aren’t treated equally because it doesn’t bring out...everyone has potential. If students aren’t able to show that, America isn’t going to...or even the whole world, we’re not going to see the true geniuses of our time just because of that.”*
27. *“They don’t give up on us. They don’t only just teach us what they have to teach but they go in depth of what they have to teach, they go further. That makes our learning better because they don’t only just see one side with a problem. They try to make a connection between two problems, like the problem both good side and the bad side. Like the existing, to go with it or to change it.”*
28. *“I feel like he said that there’re a lot of teachers that... know what’s wrong with the educational system and they still try to fight against this. But, at the same time, they teach us what we’re supposed to know.”*

## Appendix G: Chalk Talk Protocol



San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools

### Chalk Talk

*Originally developed by Hilton Smith, Foxfire Fund; adapted for the NSRF by Marylyn Wentworth.*

Chalk Talk is a silent way to do reflection, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects or solve problems. It can be used productively with any group—students, faculty, workshop participants, committees. Because it is done completely in silence, it gives groups a change of pace and encourages thoughtful contemplation. It can be an unforgettable experience. Middle Level students absolutely love it—it's the quietest they'll ever be!

#### **Format**

Time: Varies according to need; can be from 5 minutes to an hour.

Materials: Chalkboard and chalk or paper roll on the wall and markers.

#### **Process**

1. The facilitator explains VERY BRIEFLY that chalk talk is a silent activity. No one may talk at all and anyone may add to the chalk talk as they please. You can comment on other people's ideas simply by drawing a connecting line to the comment. It can also be very effective to say nothing at all except to put finger to lips in a gesture of silence and simply begin with #2.
2. The facilitator writes a relevant question in a circle on the board.
 

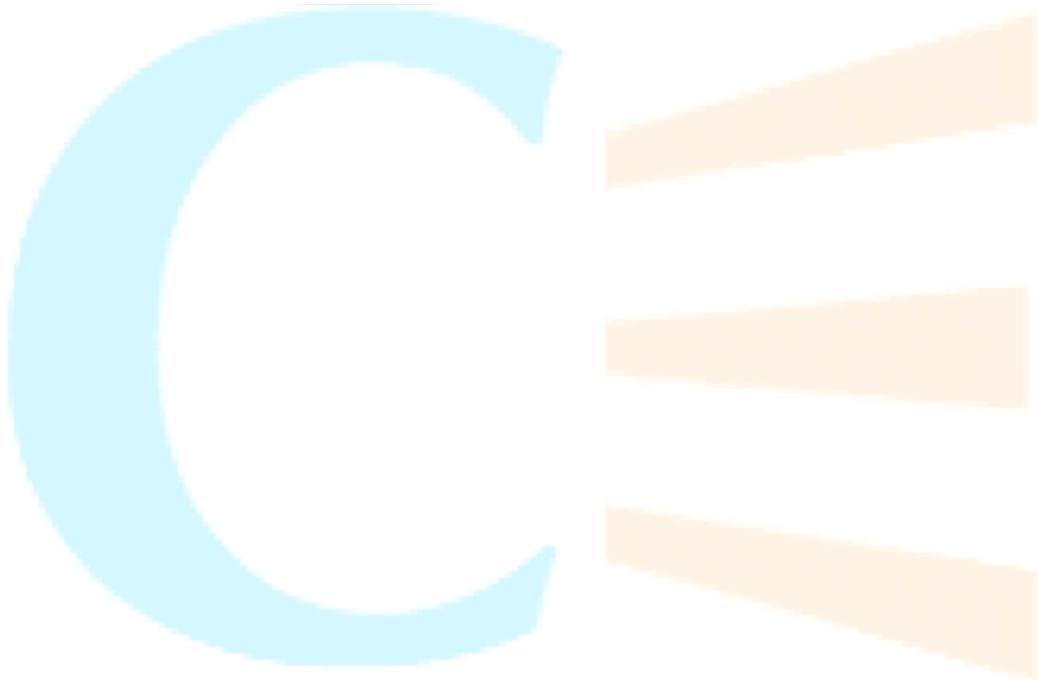
Sample questions:

  - What did you learn today?
  - So What? Or Now What?
  - What do you think about social responsibility and schooling?
  - How can we involve the community in the school, and the school in community?
  - How can we keep the noise level down in this room?
  - What do you want to tell the scheduling committee?
  - What do you know about Croatia?
  - How are decimals used in the world?
3. The facilitator either hands a piece of chalk to everyone, or places many pieces of chalk at the board and hands several pieces to people at random.
4. People write as they feel moved. There are likely to be long silences—that is natural, so allow plenty of wait time before deciding it is over.
5. How the facilitator chooses to interact with the Chalk Talk influences its outcome. The facilitator can stand back and let it unfold or expand thinking by:
  - circling other interesting ideas, thereby inviting comments to broaden
  - writing questions about a participant comment
  - adding his/her own reflection or ideas
  - connecting two interesting ideas/comments together with a line and adding a question mark.

Protocols are powerful and effective when used with an ongoing Equity-Centered professional learning community such as an Equity-Based Critical Friends Group® or iGroup and is facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about Equity-Centered professional learning communities for new or experienced coaches, please visit the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools website at [www.sfcess.org](http://www.sfcess.org). Additionally see [www.nsrharmony.org](http://www.nsrharmony.org) and <http://schoolreforminitiative.org>

Actively interacting invites participants to do the same kinds of expansions. A Chalk Talk can be an uncomplicated silent reflection or a spirited, but silent, exchange of ideas. It has been known to solve vexing problems, surprise everyone with how much is collectively known about something, get an entire project planned, or give a committee everything it needs to know without any verbal sparring.

6. When it's done, it's done.



## Appendix H: Transcribed Chalk Talk

