Educator Mindset: Perceptions of Economic Inequality and Awareness of Poverty on Student Potential

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EDUCATOR MINDSET: PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND AWARENESS OF POVERTY ON STUDENT POTENTIAL

By
Cindy B. Copich
A DISSERTATION
Presented to the Faculty of
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Abstract

EDUCATOR MINDSET: PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND AWARENESS OF POVERTY ON STUDENT POTENTIAL

Cindy B. Copich, Ed.D.
University of Nebraska, 2014

Advisor: Dr. Kay A. Keiser

Due to growing economic inequality and the increase of child poverty rates within the U.S., teachers today are more likely to work with students and families with increasingly complex and diverse economic needs. This study examines the significance of the relationship between educators’ awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset about talent and intelligence. The participants ($N = 71$) were adult students attending a Midwestern metropolitan public university’s summer educational leadership graduate course.

Survey results revealed that only two of the 71 study participants had a growth mindset. Individuals with a growth mindset generally believe that through effort, talent and intelligence can increase. However, 68% of the participants in this research study had a fixed mindset ($n = 48$), and 21 individuals had neither a growth nor a fixed mindset. Female participants ($n = 46$, $M = 4.60$, $SD = .86$) had statistically significant overall mindset (MS) scores ($t (68) = 2.03$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.49$) than males ($n = 24$, $M = 4.23$, $SD = .65$) in the study. In addition, participant scores were relatively high as measured on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey, indicating there was solid agreement
among many in the study to statements such as; “many people are disadvantaged because of their background” ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.81$). Female participants again had higher PEI scores on two of seven items ($p < .01$). Yet, there was no significant relationship between participants’ Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) scores and their Mindset (MS) or between their PEI and their MS. There was also no significant relationship found between where participants work and live and their MS, PEI, or PAQ. Results support the advantages of broader hiring and college recruitment strategies to include more individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences in order to build: awareness of poverty, understanding of barriers to economic inequality, and a growth mindset about intelligence and talent. Study conclusions also consider the influence of standards and high-stakes testing, life experience, and social justice pedagogy on teachers, students, and the current educational culture.
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the teachers of the world. Teaching is not a job but a passionate pursuit of “lighting the spark” of curiosity in the hearts and minds of students. I know that many teachers work with students that live in challenging and complex home and community environments, but so many wonderful teachers are able to view all their students with acceptance, with hope, and with compassion. Thank you! And while teaching is full of struggle, there is also extraordinary joy in supporting the personal journey of another. Like the butterfly effect, making a positive difference in the life of a young person is a tremendously powerful opportunity. Remember my friends; your teaching does transform the world.

“We don’t have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.” – Howard Zinn
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt and much gratitude to so many people that have helped bring this project to fruition. The truth is, what I learned through research and conversation was my most important pursuit. This research was sparked by the intense passion I feel as a human being to figure out how to navigate in this diverse world with so many competing interests and complex problems.

I recognized early in adolescence that my family background had provided me with some real advantages in life-- in stark contrast to the experiences of some of my classmates and friends. I am lucky enough to have been born into a family with two wonderful, loving parents that serve as great role models in pursuing education, building relationships with others, and working hard. Thanks, Mom and Dad! I also came to recognize that my skin color, my family, and my socio-economic background provided me with significant privileges, even before I was born, that continue today. I feel a deep sense of responsibility to reduce the barriers that prevent others from reaching their potential since so many of these obstacles were removed for me without any effort on my part.

I thank Mike, Liam, Reese, and Mya for their love, patience, and understanding as I passionately pursue learning. Mike knows all too well that I love to learn and take classes, and fortunately I have had his support (and a graduate assistantship that could make this possible). I feel so grateful that I could serve as a “student” role model for our kids while they were also in school.

I am so grateful to all my fellow academic wanderers, learners, and passionate family members, friends, and colleagues. What a privilege it has been to be able to be
allowed the time to undertake both an advanced degree and research of this type with such a supportive and amazing team of colleagues and professors. I am proud to have had the University of Nebraska at Omaha as my “home” institution for my undergraduate, masters, and doctoral studies. To all of those wonderful folks that I have had such an incredible honor of working with for the past several years—GF Abby Burke, HRH Kathy Rodosta, SFM Andrea Haynes, Dr. Connie Schaffer, Katherine Keiser, Wendy Loewenstein, Bridget Kratt, Ferial Pearson, and all of my incredible colleagues in the Department of Educational Leadership (Barb Mraz, Dr. Keiser, Dr. Smith, Dr. Hayes, Dr. Surface, Dr. Christie, Dr. Stansberry, Carrie Guise, and Andrea Yeager-Neuzil). Thank you for a much-needed opportunity to work with such kind, smart, and simply wonderful people, and more importantly… thank you for your part in helping me become a better person.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Economic inequality in the United States is growing at an alarming rate and is an important quality of life indicator within society (CBO, 2010; Norton & Ariely, 2011; Weinburg, 2011). Between 1979 and 2007, average after-tax incomes for the top 1% of Americans increased by more than 280% (after adjusting for inflation), according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBO, 2010). This record-high was an average increase of more than $973,000 per household. During this same time period, middle class Americans saw their earnings grow by only 25% with an average increase of $11,000 per household; likewise, the bottom fifth of American incomes increased a mere 16% (averaging $2,400 per household). Data such as this provides evidence of a shrinking middle-class as a growing number of people slide downward on the scale toward poverty.

Equally important, research demonstrates that Americans severely underestimate the economic disparity that exists (Norton & Ariely, 2013). For example, most people are unaware that the richest 20% of Americans own approximately 89% of U.S. wealth, and the richest 1% own nearly 50% of the nation’s wealth (Demhoff, 2012; Wolff, 2004). These record high earnings for the top 1% have tipped the scale of wealth and power in an alarming direction for American society and affect all citizens by influencing quality of life, economic stability, community safety, healthcare, and public education. Norton and Ariely (2011) found in their study that while the majority of Americans underestimate the current level of economic disparity, there was large consensus among respondents (representing a variety of socio-economic and political groups) for a more
equitable distribution of wealth in America. Additionally, financial preferences and priorities appear to influence how individuals vote and determine political representation (McCall & Chin, 2013). In a representative democracy, it is would be important that all citizens have an accurate understanding of the current status of economic inequality in the country; yet, it is evident that this is not the case (Norton & Ariely, 2011).

Inequality is also evident in housing areas and communities. In 2011 The U.S. Census Bureau reported that income levels shape neighborhoods. “It may be that higher-income households, when they can, choose to live away from lower-income ones, sometimes forming enclaves with little income variation” (Weinburg, 2011, p. 20). In contrast, this may also demonstrate how housing developers shape communities through economic decisions. Either way, this report by The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that communities are formed by “income sorting.” The areas with the greatest concentration of income inequality (varied degree of income variation) tend to be within cities while the suburbs show greater income segregation (Weinburg, 2011). Segregation intensifies the existence of advantages and disadvantages. This stratification leaves people in some areas to have better access to jobs, public services, quality schools, and safe neighborhoods than others, increasing economic and social inequality within society (Carter & Welner, 2013; Condron, Tope, Steidl, & Freeman, 2013).

Increased national and local income and wealth inequality trends mirror the growth in poverty rates. In 2012, the United States had more than 45 million people considered to be living in poverty. Since 2010, The Census Bureau reports both the official poverty measure and the supplemental poverty measure (SPM). The SPM takes into account government benefits and expenses for basic needs that are not in the official
measure. In 2012, the SPM rate was slightly higher than the official poverty rate, identifying 49.7 million people (16% of the U.S. population) as poor, including these additional government benefits which still do not allow people to take care of their basic needs or the needs of their families (Center for American Progress, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). According to 2012 figures, it costs a two-parent middle income household $241,080 to raise one child in America to age 18 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2013). This supports recent findings from The U.S. Census Bureau (2013b) that those 18 years and younger are the largest segment of the population considered to be poor.

It is also important to distinguish between income and wealth and how they relate to poverty. Net income does not take into account actual expenses. Income can take on many different forms. For the rich, income is not as important as wealth. Wealth refers to assets that people own minus their debt, something people in poverty are seldom able to acquire (Center for American Progress, 2007; Domhoff, 2012). Poverty is a moving figure, and different people are constantly moving above and below the poverty threshold. Those above the threshold, however, are not necessarily much better off than those below the threshold. Families with little to no assets are constantly in threat of dropping below the poverty threshold, often due to unforeseen circumstances (Center for American Progress, 2007; D. Drozd, presentation, August 19, 2014).

In the 1970s, child poverty rates in America dropped to their lowest at 14%, but by 2010 more than 23% of American children were living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Currently, the United States has the highest child poverty rate among developed nations, while also providing fewer social supports and resources compared to
other countries (Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010). The elderly are equally susceptible to poverty making both ends of the age spectrum vulnerable. “There is already an imbalance in what we spend on the elderly versus what we spend on children and the aging of the population is likely to exacerbate this trend. In 2012, about 10% of the federal budget was allocated to children while 40% was used on programs primarily serving the elderly” (Tonkinson, 2014, p. 14).

Based on general population totals, there are more Whites that are poor since they make up more of the overall population; nevertheless, there are racial and gender related underpinnings involved in the issues of poverty (Carter & Welner, 2013; Munin & Wise, 2012). In Nebraska, approximately one out of five children live in poverty (Tonkinson, 2014). The poverty rate of Black or African American children in Omaha, Nebraska is the 23rd highest in nation with more than 31% living in poverty (Tonkinson, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), which is double the overall national poverty rate. Omaha is also listed in the top ten according to current 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) poverty rankings of 100 of the most populated metropolitan areas. “Families of color are much more likely to live in poverty and thereby have less access to societal benefits granted to the economically privileged” (Munin & Wise, 2012, p. 7). Similar to other states and the national statistics on poverty, Blacks/African Americans and Hispanics are disproportionately poor (Carter & Welner, 2013; Munin & Wise, 2012).

Confounding the problem and preventing an effective response to rising rates of poverty, many U.S. citizens are indifferent to the widening gap of prosperity and opportunity (Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). This indifference further demonstrates how inequality and poverty in America can be perpetuated and
imposes institutional and instructional barriers for students (Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010). “Poverty can lead to stressors such as drug abuse, violence, and other social ills as well as poor medical care, deficient nutrition, and a struggle for the bare necessities for survival—and all of these conditions harm children’s lives, including their school experiences” (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 83). Many researchers and academics (Carter & Welner, 2013; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012) would argue that an individual’s effort is not enough to overcome the significant barriers that inequality and poverty cause in reaching one’s potential.

**Poverty Beliefs’ Impact on Education**

Educators do not often recognize the societal, institutional, and instructional barriers caused by poverty and inequality. Barriers to student progress can be both visible and covert, especially if teachers are not aware of their underlying beliefs and values (Milner, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Beliefs and values are transferred into practice in the classroom (Banks, 1997; Milner, 2010). How a teacher views the potential of his or her students has a tremendous impact on student motivation and learning (Gay, 2000; Kerman, Kimball, & Martin, 1980; Milner, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Research implies that those with greater financial means feel they deserve their wealth due to perceived individual traits and skills, whereas those of lower socio-economic status (SES) attribute poverty and wealth to individual circumstances (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). If an educator views poverty as tied to a deficit of an individual’s skills, does this thinking promote an identity of failure in the classroom when working with students living in poverty?
Carol Dweck (2008, 2010, 2012), a professor of Psychology at Stanford University, has conducted more than 40 years of research on the importance of mindset in reaching one’s potential. Her research is significant to the field of education because of the influence it has on student motivation and the powerful influence of teacher and student beliefs. If educators view intelligence as a fixed trait, Dweck (2012) believes this message translates to students in the form of identity. Whereas, setbacks are opportunities to learn for those with a growth mindset, people with a fixed mindset associate failure (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure). This way of thinking about challenges undermines a student’s ability to learn (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). These educational barriers often go unrecognized and unaddressed due to a lack of awareness and understanding by the educator and the student. Dweck’s longitudinal research supports the understanding that potential is the capacity to develop skills with effort and practice. When educators limit their mindset regarding intelligence and learning, it is conceivable for them to underestimate their students’ potential to develop and also place unintended barriers in the classroom that limit progress (Milner, 2010). This indicates a need for further research.

While economic disparity has sparked national debate regarding poverty, as well as academic attention and scholarly writing, no research has been conducted to consider this relationship between educators’ awareness of poverty, their perceptions of inequality, and their mindset of student potential. None of this attention or research has led to sustainable changes in policy or practice that could result in a more equitable system for people and families living in poverty. More importantly, poverty and growing inequality continue to affect the quality of life for all Americans (Carter & Welner, 2013).
Theoretical Framework

Carol Dweck (2008, 2010, 2012) has conducted extensive research focusing on why people are different in the way they think and behave. She has spent most of her career studying if human traits are rooted at birth or if these qualities (such as intelligence, personality, and morals) can change. By considering the latest neuroplasticity research (Aydin et al., 2007; Ceccarelli et al., 2009), conducting studies on motivation, and through her knowledge of human development, she came to recognize that individual development is not a nature or nurture issue but rather a consideration of the importance of both. Over time, Dweck developed a theory about how people think about themselves and others. This belief system can make a difference in a person’s effort and motivation to improve and ultimately reach their potential. She currently describes this theory as mindset (Dweck, 2010).

Dweck’s research has found people with a fixed mindset believe an individual’s traits and qualities cannot be changed. In contrast, people with a growth mindset believe traits and qualities like intelligence, sports ability, musical talent, personality, etc. can be developed and improved with effort and practice. Dweck found people with a growth mindset have the passion, motivation, and potential to learn as a result, they will persevere through challenges. Fixed mindset beliefs limit the potential of individuals since these people associate failure as an identity, not as an opportunity to learn. Individuals with a growth rather than a fixed mindset are also better at assessing their personal strengths and weaknesses (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This allows for greater personal and professional improvement and an increase in motivation to focus the effort needed to bring about the desired change.
The specific area of Dweck’s work that has the most potential impact for educators is the teacher’s mindset about student potential. Dweck does not dispute there are important genetic, environmental, and opportunity differences that affect the development and academic success of children; however, her research has shown that a teacher’s mindset can make a tremendous difference. A teacher’s approach with students sends a message to the student about his or her potential.

This approach is often hampered by the fact that many educators have little knowledge of cognitive science or of brain plasticity, which is a cornerstone of growth mindset thinking (Dweck, 2010). Cognitive tests (or IQ tests) measure developed ability (Ricci, 2013; Sternberg, 2014). In many cases, when a child lacks the opportunity, environment, and resources to develop cognitive skills along with their same-age peers then an IQ test would not be an accurate measure of intelligence (Delpit, 2012). Yet IQ tests and many other assessments are used quite frequently to place students in special programs ranging from special education to high-ability programming (Delpit, 2012; Milner, 2010; Sternberg, 2014).

Children who grow up in poverty may have limited resources in order to develop their cognitive skills at the same pace as peers raised in higher socio-economic environments where parents can afford a greater number of intellectually nurturing experiences for their children (Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Ravitch, 2013). H. Richard Milner IV (2010) refers to the resulting gap in educational outcomes for students as an opportunity gap. “As an explanation of disparate outcomes, opportunity is multifaceted, complicated, process-oriented, and much more nuanced than achievement” (Milner, 2010, p. 7). Teachers with a growth mindset believe that all children can and do
learn, regardless of their starting point (Dweck, 2010, 2012). Yet, both positive and negative labels categorizing students can minimize the effort both teachers and students put forth to improve performance. If they feel defined by a category or test through a fixed mindset, rather than understanding the importance of effort and motivation in reaching their potential through a growth mindset, students may struggle unnecessarily to succeed (Dweck, 2010, 2012).

These teacher beliefs become part of pedagogical practice and are realized in teacher expectations and learning opportunities for students (Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Dweck, 2010). Researching the mindset of educators (teachers and administrators) may provide important insight into the success of all children in school, but it may be particularly important for students labeled as low-achieving, at-risk, poor, or categorized under the subset of “free and reduced lunch” by their school district (Banks, 1997). Students identified by these categories and many others may be at a tremendous disadvantage in classrooms where a teacher has fixed mindset beliefs about intelligence and individual traits.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the significance of the relationship between educators’ awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset about student potential. This is an important consideration because of growing wealth and income inequality and the increase of child poverty rates within the country. Teachers will have more contact with struggling students as these trends increase. It is particularly important for teachers and administrators to have an awareness of these complex issues and a deeper understanding of the barriers to those living in poverty.
While Yeager and Dweck (2012) have shown how a student’s mindset is important and can help build resiliency to challenges, a teacher’s mindset impacts the potential of all the students in the class (Dweck, 2008, 2010, 2012). This may be particularly important for students living in poverty since their lives are already personally challenging.

Teacher and administrator preparation programs, educational policies, and classroom practices all have a major impact on students. Identifying significant characteristics of teachers and administrators that might relate to an awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset of student potential may also be of interest to both universities and school districts. Understanding the significance of these factors and the significance of their relationship to one another would be the first step in making programmatic, policy, and/or pedagogical changes.

**Research Questions**

1. At the 2014 LEAD (Leadership in Educational Administration) Academy, what were educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty as measured with the Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ)?

2. What were participants’ perceptions as measured on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey?

3. What was the mindset participants had of talent and intelligence as measured on the Mindset Survey (MS)?

4. How significant was the correlation among educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty (PAQ) and their mindset (MS)?
5. What was the correlation between participants’ Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) raw score and the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey items?

6. What was the correlation between participants’ Mindset (MS) average total score and particular items on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI)?

7. Was there a statistically significant difference on selected Mindset survey (MS) scores based on participant gender?

8. Was there a significant difference on Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) items based on participant gender?

9. Was there a significant difference in scores measuring the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) of participants who work in an area where the Median Family Income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to scores on the PEI of participants who work in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

10. Was there a significant difference in scores measuring Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) of participants who live in an area where the Median Family Income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to scores on the PEI of participants who live in an area where the median family income is above the Nebraska average MFI?

11. Was there a significant difference in average total scores on the Mindset Survey (MS) of participants who work in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to average total scores on the MS of participants who work in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

12. Was there a significant difference in average total scores on the Mindset Survey (MS) of participants who live in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below
the Nebraska MFI compared to average total scores on the MS of participants who live in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

**Definition of Terms**

**Inequality.** This term indicates a lack of balance and equality in the area of wealth, income, and/or power in society making it likely that some individuals have greater access to opportunities and advantages than others (Rawls, 1971).

**LEAD Academy.** LEAD (Leadership in Educational Administration) Academy is a summer graduate class at a metropolitan public university in the Midwest. This graduate course provides a unique opportunity, bringing together aspiring and current school leaders with community partners to explore the challenges of school/community relationships. LEAD Academy is designed to focus on ISLLC Standard 4 (CCSSO, 2008), “An educational leader who promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to the diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources” (p. 21). Adopted by the Department of Educational Leadership, this standard is now one of the key areas of curricular content for both of the LEAD courses (EDL 8050 School Community and EDL 8020 Educational Policy).

This course is a joint effort between two affiliated institutions with teacher and administrative preparation programs. LEAD Academy provides adult learners an opportunity to earn three credit hours in four intense days of coursework. Students complete course assignments and the service-learning project after course instruction.

**Median Family Income (MFI).** The median divides family income distribution into two equal parts: one-half of families are below the median and the other half is
above. The MFI is calculated by combining the incomes of all members, 15 years and older, who are related to the householder into one figure (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b).

**Mindset.** Mindset is a term developed by Carol Dweck (2010) referring to the way people think about abilities, skills, and talents as either expandable or static. *Growth mindset* beliefs view traits, talent, and skills as pliant through concentrated goals, effort, and practice. *Fixed mindset* beliefs interpret traits, talent, and skills as set and unchangeable. Research has shown that mindset can have a tremendous influence on an individual reaching their potential (Dweck, 2010, 2012).

**Poverty.** There are a variety of indicators used to determine levels of socio-economic or class status, many of which are arbitrary. Throughout this research study, *poverty* will not be defined by a specific dollar figure such as the statistical classification of leveled thresholds determined by The U.S. Census Bureau (2013a), unless stated otherwise. For example, the 2013 poverty threshold for a family of four with two children under 18 is $23,624 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a) and bears no geographic variation, meaning it is the same nationwide. Many consider these thresholds controversial and argue that they fail to accurately describe the magnitude and complexity of poverty, nor are the people living above that threshold much better off than those below (Gorski, 2013; Munin, 2012). Instead, this research study will use the conceptual definition of poverty used by Paul Gorski (2013), and developed by the Children’s Defense Fund (2008), which describes a living condition within society where people “lack adequate financial resources to meet their basic needs” (Gorski, 2013, p. 8). Nonetheless, it is important to consider the diversity of people and experiences of those in poverty and how a large number of people move in and out of poverty throughout their lives (Gorski,
For this research project, this definition will also encompass both \textit{situational and generational poverty}, although they can be very different from one another.

\textbf{Privilege.} For this research project, \textit{privilege} will be defined as an entitlement or benefit that is enjoyed by a person, or group of people, who experience advantages that are beyond those experienced by most within society. This advantage predominantly benefits those who have political, economic, and social power. It is assumed that where privilege exists, there are also individuals or groups that are oppressed (Carter \& Welner, 2013; McIntosh, 2012).

\textbf{Social Justice.} The term \textit{social justice} can be a philosophy, a theory, a practice, and an action focused on “treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity (Neito \& Bode, 2012). Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) state that “social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (1997, p. 3). From a classroom perspective, \textit{social justice} is focused on providing students with the necessary resources in order for them to learn and strive towards their potential. This is a vision of schools and classrooms where all students have an equal opportunity to learn (Nieto \& Bode, 2012).

\textbf{Teacher and Administrator Preparation Programs.} This term refers to the program of study at a college or university that prepares teachers and administrators for state licensure in their specific field. A \textit{pre-service teacher or administrator} and \textit{teacher or administrator candidate} are both similar terms referring to the students within the preparation program.
Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that participants were honest when completing the instruments and reporting their awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset about student potential. It is also assumed that graduate student participants accurately completed the demographic information regarding their race/ethnicity, age, current position, program of university study, background information, and home and work zip codes. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity so it is expected that students felt free to provide their honest responses without fear of being identified and having negative consequences regarding future hiring, graduation, or their course grade.

Limitations

The students enrolled in the LEAD Academy course, which participated in the survey, may not demographically or philosophically, represent graduate students in other areas of the country. Furthermore, perception data are limited to what an individual believes is true about themselves and may not provide an accurate representation of how they really think and act. Given that this survey was conducted during an Educational Policy (EDL 8020) and School Community (EDL 8050) course, provided through LEAD Academy while students are at the university, the topics of the survey indicate their importance to participants and may influence responses.

Moreover, the graduate students in Educational Leadership courses are predominantly White (K. Keiser, personal communication, August 25, 2014). This is a limitation of the study since the participant group was rather homogeneous. This sample
population did not provide sufficient representation to make race/ethnicity correlations in the study of awareness of poverty, perception of economic inequality, and mindset.

This research project did not have access to extensive information regarding participants’ prior life or teaching experiences that may have contributed to their perceptions of inequality, their mindset, or their awareness of poverty. Therefore, these factors were not included in this study. Additionally, this research project did not allow for a study of poverty through participant personal and family experiences due to a limited representation of those that self-identified as “poor” when growing up on the requested demographic indicators. Further consideration of the personal and professional factors that influence individual perceptions and awareness is an area for future investigation given the disparity that exists among various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups and the increasingly diverse student population present in classrooms today. Poverty related to race and ethnicity will not be specifically studied in this project; yet, it is an important factor for additional study given current trends.

Finally, most mindset research conducted over the last 20 years has been with school-age children and undergraduate college students (Dweck, . There is a lack of research available to the investigator on the mindset of teachers and administrators within the United States. Rheinburg’s (2001) mindset study involved teachers from Germany but was not available in English.

**Delimitations**

The study will be delimited to graduate students enrolled in the first session of summer 2014 class at a Midwestern metropolitan public university. As a staff member of this university, this sampling population is available to the researcher. In addition, this
research project will be delimited to graduate students taking either School Community (EDL 8050) or Educational Policy (EDL 8020) through the LEAD Academy at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Both courses are required for those pursuing their Masters degree in Educational Administration.

**Significance of the Study**

A fundamental premise of teacher and administrator preparation programs is to prepare these individuals to work effectively with a diverse population of students in preschool through high school and the adults working with them (Milner, 2010; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), 2008; The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2008). To do so successfully, university programs must prepare teachers and administrators for classrooms and schools that are often far different from the ones they themselves experienced as elementary and high school students. Many teachers and administrators are White and from middle-class backgrounds (Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008; Milner, 2010; Valentín, 2006). Furthermore, they were often raised in suburban and rural areas (Herrick, 2010) so they may be unfamiliar with the reality of their students’ home environments (Delpit, 2012; Milner, 2010). In order to support the effort of educators working with low-income students and families, it is important that teachers and administrators are equipped with accurate information to inform and shape their beliefs, values, and classroom practices (Carter & Welner, 2013; Koeppen & Davison-Jenkins, 2007; Milner, 2010). White educators must know the importance of raising their cross-cultural and cross-racial awareness and effectiveness in order to positively impact complex issues that minority student populations experience within our nation’s school system (Carter & Welner, 2013; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010).
“When we fail to recognize the racialized nature of our identity as White people, we are ignoring the potential for race-based barriers between ourselves and our student and thereby contributing to the reproduction of racial inequalities” (Howard, 2006, p. 122).

Educators typically live above the level of poverty in most areas within the United States, in sharp contrast to the home environments of their students (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2012). Given the growing issue of inequality and poverty within the nation and local communities, it is important that educators have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to work with students from all backgrounds and are prepared to fulfill essential roles in shaping the future of their communities (Koeppen & Davison-Jenkins, 2007; University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2014). Several of the components, which describe this commitment more fully, state that preparation programs challenge candidates to:

- address issues of social justice and become agents of change,
- identify knowledge bases that value diversity and incorporate urban and global perspectives, and
- recognize underserved perspectives and act as advocates of equity and cultural competence. (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2014, para.3)

Using a survey to gauge the awareness and perception of educators in regard to poverty, economic inequality, and mindset is only the first step. It is important for preparation programs, teachers, and administrators to understand the various factors that shape the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of pre-service and new educators in order to effectively support and encourage successful school and classroom leaders (Koeppen & Davison-Jenkins, 2007; Milner, 2010). In fact, according to Carol Dweck (2008) it is
important that teachers be taught about growth mindset and develop the skills necessary
to develop this mindset with students in their classrooms. Dweck believes educators with
both fixed and growth mindsets create self-fulfilling prophecies. Though, when teachers
hold a growth mindset more students are able to succeed.

For educators with a fixed mindset, training must counteract the years of experience that confirms their fixed mindset. Teacher-training curricula in schools of education, continuing education programs for existing teachers, and training for young teachers participating in such programs as Teach for America need to include: a) the latest findings in brain plasticity and their implications for all children’s potential to learn, b) the findings that dedication and self-improvement- and not just existing talent- bring students long-term success, c) the finding that process praise promotes more lasting confidence and motivation than intelligence praise or outcome praise, and d) information on the need for students at all levels to be challenged appropriately. (Dweck, 2008, p. 15)

Thus, the results of this study may be useful in determining the need for targeted professional development in area schools, considering programmatic changes to teacher and administrator preparation programs, exploring local and state policy changes, and for identifying possible changes in university recruitment of teacher/administrative candidates (Milner, 2010). Teacher and administrator preparation programs and university recruitment strategies also influence the pool of teacher and administrative candidates available to local districts. Future research may consider a more diverse sample of participants in order to adequately study additional background and demographic factors that may play an important role in shaping a teacher or administrator’s awareness, perception, and mindset. Dweck (2008) communicates the
importance of employers supporting this growth mindset concept in their employees, therefore, interview questions that work to identify teachers and administrators with a growth mindset may be an important part of future hiring processes.

**Outline of the Study**

A presentation of literature relevant to this study of poverty, perceptions of barriers to progress, and mindset of teachers and administrators is presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three describes the research questions, participants, survey instrument, and procedures involved in the study. Chapter Four depicts the results of the statistical analyses, while Chapter Five summarizes the findings through a conclusion and discussion.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

To ensure that teachers and administrators are prepared to meet the educational needs of all learners through a caring and equitable approach, it is necessary that educators have an accurate understanding of the social, political, and economic contexts of the community inside and outside of the school. Economic inequality and poverty are increasing along with the diverse student population. An understanding of the mindset of educational leaders (teachers and administrators) is essential when determining their impact on student potential. The main areas of literature reviewed in this chapter are: 1) intersections of poverty, 2) economic inequality, 3) privilege, 4) social justice, 5) opportunity, 6) mindset, and 7) teacher expectations.

Intersections of Poverty

Nationally between 2000-2012, the percent of people in poverty increased from 12.2% to 15.9%, or from 33 million people to more than 48 million in poverty. Across this same 12-year time span, both the number of people and percent of people in poverty increased in 44 U.S. states (National Poverty Center; 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). This was the highest rate of poverty in the country since 1993 and one of highest of any industrialized nation in the world (Carter & Welner, 2013). Beyond the moral argument for supporting one another in the community, this information is important since poverty is more pervasive currently in the U.S. than in the past. The Center for American Progress (2014) reports that nearly one in three citizens will spend at least one year of their lives in poverty. These issues are obviously tied to homelessness, hunger, and other physical and emotional needs (Gorski, 2013).
What is more striking is the considerable disparity of poverty rates between racial and ethnic groups that is hidden beneath the combined national average (Carter & Welner, 2013; National Poverty Center, 2013). When comparisons are made among racial/ethnic subgroups, Black or African American and Hispanic poverty rates far exceed the national average. “In 2010, 27.4% of blacks and 26.6% of Hispanics were poor, compared to 9.9% of non-Hispanic Whites and 12.1% of Asians” (National Poverty Center, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Nebraska’s overall poverty rate has held relatively stable over the last several years at 13% but has risen more than 4% since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Children are disproportionately poor or living in poverty in the United States. These children are 24% of the total population, but 36% of those living in poverty (National Poverty Center, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). In 2010, 16.4 million children (22%) were poor; this is the highest child poverty rate reported since The U.S. Census Bureau began reporting in 2001 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). As with the national poverty rate, minority racial and ethnic subgroups of children are disproportionately more likely to be living in poverty than White children. This is also true of Nebraska, where in 2010 The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) reported that 15% of children in poverty were White, 34% were of Hispanic origin, and 52% were Black or African American. These statistics demonstrate the intersection of race and poverty both nationally and locally. According to the Nebraska Homeless Assistance Program (2013), there are currently more than 13,000 homeless children (17 and younger) living throughout the state. Poverty is complicated, and poor people are diverse (Gorski, 2013).
Even after a period of desegregation and busing in the 1970s, most major U.S. cities have students of color attending schools with a high concentration of poverty (Lerner, 2011, June 9). According to the Kids Count in Nebraska Report (Tonkinson, 2014) published on an annual basis, there continues to be an ongoing relationship between race/ethnicity and poverty in Omaha, Nebraska, as in the rest of the country. “These disparities grew out of a history of systemic barriers to opportunity for people of color and still have a presence in our society and institutions today. We need to continue working to address these barriers in order to ensure that all children have the best opportunity to succeed” (Tonkinson, 2014, p. 58). The intersections of poverty and race will continue to grow given the current trends in child population growth that show a minority-majority shift by 2020 (Frey, 2012, December 13). This population shift will influence the current political environment as these children mature to voting age and place school systems in a continued mode of adaptation to the growing cultural and language differences of students, families, and community members. Universities that train both pre-service teachers and pre-service administrators need to ensure that their graduates are prepared to work within these diverse schools. As demonstrated, many of these schools are in areas of high poverty (Milner, 2010).

Due to growing inequality and poverty, schools across the country spend an increasing amount of time and money determining and securing external supports for low-income families in addition to the evidence of struggle to provide for students’ educational needs (Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010). “One of the reasons that simplistic approaches to addressing poverty or supporting low-income students don’t work is that poverty does not happen in a vacuum. In fact it’s tied to all
sorts of other identities and forms of discrimination, including gender and sexism, race and racism, and even disability and ableism” (Gorski, 2013, p. 44). As described earlier, other developed countries focus their education spending on teaching and learning rather than providing support for basic needs for low-income families (Carter & Welner, 2013). This is not to say that these supports are not important or necessary, but rather to highlight how other countries take a different approach. “American children living in poverty have a much weaker safety net than their peers in other industrialized countries, where universal health care, housing subsidies, and high-quality childcare are the norm” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 32). It is important to determine which institutional system is best suited to do what and how much money and/or resources should be allocated when working together to support all families and students in need. Many of these disparities are outside of the school’s control and more importantly out of the power of children to change; however, they are essential and important for those who work with, care for, and teach U.S. children (Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Gorski, 2013; Munin & Wise, 2012). In addition to examining the allocation of educational supports for students in poverty, a study of the relationship of economic inequality at the local level is also important to this research initiative.

**Economic Inequality**

Income inequality is on the rise in Nebraska and 46 other states according to The U.S. Census Bureau (2012). The annual U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) collects a variety of measures at the state and community level. The 2000 census revealed a Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI) of $48,032; which converts to $66,189 in 2012 dollars. The 2008-12 ACS showed a Nebraska MFI of $64,820. Family
income has declined by $1,369 (2.1%) in Nebraska since 1999 (D. Drozd, personal communication, August 19, 2014). Even Sarpy County, one of Nebraska’s fastest growing counties, revealed a decline in household income. David Drozd, University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Research Coordinator at the Center for Public Research, reported to the *Lincoln Journal Star* that there was a 7% point increase in low-income families in both Douglas (currently 33% of families are low-income) and Lancaster (34% of families are low-income) counties which indicates rising income inequality among area households (Piersol, 2013, December 17).

**Privilege**

Peggy McIntosh (2012) provides an articulate explanation of privilege in terms of a “horizontal line of social justice, parallel to the floor or the ground” (p. 197). She explains how those below the line are oppressed and often mistreated, whereas people above the horizontal line of social justice are often given power, encouragement, and unearned advantages. McIntosh believes that all people have experiences above and below the line of social justice depending upon a variety of circumstances, many of which are arbitrary and unearned. “Nobody is only privileged or only disadvantaged. Different types of privilege and disadvantage can add to, subtract from, multiply or divide one’s chances for a decent life” (McIntosh, 2012, p. 197). Students and adults who have difficulty understanding privilege and who believe all people earn their status in society need to consider evidence and seek a deep understanding in order to form accurate perceptions and beliefs (McIntosh, 2012; Milner, 2010).

Pratto and Stewart (2012) have studied and written about the difficulty of raising the awareness of privileges for the dominant group. These advantages are often invisible;
what individuals cannot see or experience simply does not exist. The privileged group often lacks the information provided by the social comparison and life experience of the non-dominant group. The authors demonstrate through their research that unless the dominant or more powerful group has the experiences of lower-status people ‘legitimized’ to them, this group will ignore the information available to them and continue to discredit the identities and experiences of the less powerful. Although exploring and discussing privilege is important, there is often strong resistance among members of the dominant socio-political group when drawing attention to their unearned privilege (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). This resistance can present itself in many ways, from angry opposition to silent defiance. Sanders and Mahalingam (2012) found that middle-class students attending college are less willing and able to talk about class status than working class students. Middle-class students also have more negative or punitive attitudes than those of minority groups. This conflict surrounding privilege occurs even within teacher preparation programs and work with college students (Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Milner, 2010; Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012).

Research (McIntosh, 2012; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; Pratto and Stewart, 2012) shows that women are more likely than men to recognize privilege and inequality. As previously explained, this may be likely due to a woman’s non-dominant position in society. Women (and other non-dominant groups) are better able to legitimize the experiences of less powerful groups because of their ability to make social comparisons of themselves to others. Stated more simply, due to inequality of women’s pay in the workplace, women who have first-hand experience of gender-related inequality may find it easier to understand that unearned privilege would exist for dominant groups in other
areas of society. Still, even within categories of non-dominant groups there is privilege that often goes unrealized for a variety of complicated reasons (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). For example, women of color and lesbians may experience an even greater disadvantage than heterosexual white women within the same non-dominant category; thus, social category norms and one’s intersectional identity within a group further influence and complicate who “counts” and who doesn’t in society. This also speaks to the complex nature of raising the awareness of privilege, inequality, and authenticating the experiences of “others.” It suggests “intersections of dominance and subordination will be particularly effective locations from which to recognize one’s own privilege and develop the ‘moral outrage’ about it that has been understood to fuel efforts to change current inequalities” (Montgomery & Stewart, 2012, p. 163). Thus, as a result of social comparison and personal experience members of less powerful groups are better able to question their position within the dominant/non-dominant power structure of society and take action (Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

Recognizing inequality is not the same as recognizing privilege. “In fact, dominant identity is so normative, it may be easier for members of dominant groups to understand their group identity in contrast to subordinated groups” (Pratto & Stewart, 2012, p. 42). The recurring explanation for why there are privileged and less privileged individuals in society is to blame the oppressed or under-privileged. This message implies that people who are poor are simply not skilled, nor talented, and are not putting in enough effort to change their circumstances (Carter & Welner, 2013; Milner, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Singleton & Linton, 2006). While those living in poverty are accused of taking more than their fair share by abusing government assistance. In fact, it
is clear that those at the top of the scale receive their own form of government benefits through tax cuts, legal protections, and political advantages (Domhoff, 2012). Certainly, these privileges can build a sense of entitlement by the dominant members with greater financial security and socio-political status that further magnifies the problems associated with inequality and poverty (Milner, 2010). Students in lower socio-economic schools or lower-income geographic areas, are not given access to the highest qualified teachers, adequate educational resources, or the same educational opportunities as their wealthier peers (Carter & Welner, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Milner, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Due to this disparity in opportunities, it is important for educators to examine their moral obligation to students that is often referred to as social justice.

**Social Justice**

Teachers can be passionate about the experiences and the lives of their students. Passionate teaching honors the profession, the practitioner, and the student (Fried, 1995; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Educators are passionate about teaching and learning pedagogy and take seriously their role of continuing to develop the skills and knowledge of their students as well as for themselves (Koeppen & Davison-Jenkins, 2007). The teacher’s focus tends to be on what is going on inside the classroom rather than on other important aspects that impact students’ learning outside the school environment. This school-centered focus of the profession may lead many educators to neglect or disengage from the outside socio-political influences (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Although these influences inevitably affect students, teachers, and the community, many teachers do little to act in response (Gibboney, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Milner, 2010). “There are
many great schools in this country that offer every possible opportunity to learn in empowering and engaging ways. And more of them are open to a wider range of children than was once the case. This leads many to assume that inequality has been eliminated from the national landscape” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 29). When inequities within the education system are recognized, passionate and caring teachers do more than develop coping mechanisms and resiliency in students. They actively engage in influencing positive change both inside and outside the walls of school by identifying their own values and beliefs, empowering others to share their voice (Gay, 2000; Milner, 2010; Nieto, 2003). Paulo Freire (1970) says that education is politics. Teachers that think more critically about the socio-political context of their work in the classroom and society are able to think more strategically about the broader political work of education (Nieto, 2003).

Many educational trends and policies of today, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTT), and charter schools, have educators and parents questioning the role of these initiatives in improving instructional practices, the quality of life, and the learning environment for students (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Milner, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Ravitch, 2013). It is also worth considering what educational policies, practices, and politics also impede social justice in society. The purpose of social justice education is to provide equal inclusion of all groups of society, not simply focusing on the needs and demands of the dominant and/or powerful group or the privileged individuals or groups (Howard, 2006). Some of the advantages relevant to social justice include money, property, jobs, education, medical care, childcare, elder care, scholarships, personal security, housing, transportation, political representation, and
opportunities for leisure. Disadvantages include military service, dangerous work, and other hardships (Milner, 2010). Rawls (1971) believed that inequalities in society should be organized to allow the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society and viewed this as the “justice of fairness.” This further exemplifies the goal of many school districts that struggle to form inclusive, fair, and equitable learning communities where all children can and will learn (Carter & Welner, 2013; Gay, 2000; Milner, 2010; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

**Opportunity**

A current view from social science research is that although people have the freedom of independent choice, they also are born into and remain in a location within society. People’s lives and their place in society relate to social, economic, and cultural structures that exist among the complex system of relationships and power (Carter & Welner, 2013; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010; Singleton & Linton, 2006). “Being born into a low-income Appalachian family in the hills of eastern Kentucky is to take life on from a different location in society’s opportunity structure than being born into a high-income family in the northern suburbs of Chicago” (Steele, 2010, p. 196). Various locations within these social, economic, and cultural structures give people access to different resources, skills, knowledge, opportunities, and life experiences.

People can become segregated within society, communities, and schools on the basis of these characteristics, and this affects the resources, networks, and opportunities available to them (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010; Munin & Wise, 2012; Steele, 2010). These systems of privilege for some and not for others creates an unjust society. People among these more economically advantaged relationships and within wealthier
locations have greater access to quality schools, qualified teachers, jobs, healthcare, loans, and housing than similar people in less wealthy locations and networks (Carter & Welner, 2013; Munin & Wise, 2012; Steele, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010). “Kids who live in areas with a high poverty concentration—regardless of their own economic circumstances—are at increased risk of having problems in school, getting involved with gangs or other negative peer groups, and failing to attain successful employment” (Tonkinson, 2014, pg. 60). Thus, locations differ in the privileges and opportunities they offer and these often-unearned advantages have a big effect on an individual’s opportunity for success (Carter & Welner, 2013; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Steele, 2010; Gladwell, 2008).

Privilege allows the dominant social, political, and economic group to perpetuate certain misbeliefs and misperceptions about themselves and about those in poverty (Gay, 2000; Gorski, 2013; Howard, 2006; Munin & Wise, 2012; Steele, 2010), especially if the individuals of the dominate group have not experienced homelessness or long-term hunger. Studies show that a popular belief among the majority of U.S. citizens is that poor people are poor as a result of their personal deficits (Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010). The belief is that a lack of effort, skill, intelligence, values, etc. cause the inequalities in society. The media further perpetuate these misperceptions with stories of those that “make it” despite serious barriers and disadvantage. This message is so deep with in society that even poor people believe they “get what they deserve” even when upward mobility for the poor is rare (Bamfield & Horton, 2009; Carter & Welner, 2013; Gladwell, 2008; Howard, 2006; Mazumder, 2005; Swartz, 2008). Disadvantages are multi-faceted, fluid, and experienced by everyone and “can influence the directions our
lives take and the roles we play in society” (McIntosh, 2012, p. 197). These dominant and perpetuated beliefs can even influence the opinions of people living in poverty to withhold political support for social programs and benefits that they themselves would benefit from receiving (Bamfield & Horton, 2009).

In separate studies conducted by Bamfield and Horton (2009) and Castell and Thompson (2007), participants consistently were able to associate both positive and negative stereotypes to the rich, but struggled to identify any positive stereotypes to the poor. These researchers also found that individuals in their study tended to have a magnified sense of benefit fraud by the poor and a minimized view of tax evasion by the wealthy. However, studies referenced in Bamfield and Horton (2009) report that tax avoidance is much more costly in terms of lost revenue than the cost of benefits fraud.

What is it that drives these judgments and stereotypes of people in poverty and perceptions of economic inequality? Bamfield and Horton (2009) found that two key factors were especially influential in shaping these negative beliefs and stereotypes: the overwhelming misperceptions about individual’s access to opportunity which resulted in a variety of explanation that blame poverty on the poor, and the false belief that benefit recipients (poor people) did not reciprocally benefit society by making contributions themselves. “Participants in our discussion groups tended to attribute success or failure overwhelmingly to individual rather than structural factors” (Bamfield & Horton, 2009, p. 24). Many individuals in the study went on to reference individual success stories as examples of how people they have known “pulled themselves up by their boot straps” through individual effort and hard work. These misperceptions and lack of awareness cause and perpetuate a deficit view of people living in poverty (Bamfield & Horton,
and expressed a belief that opportunities are available. So, it is perceived as the responsibility of the individual to succeed (Bamfield & Horton, 2009).

The judgments and stereotypes of those with limited financial, social, and political capital can further demoralize and impede progress for all people. When these deficit beliefs of those in poverty are held by the classroom teacher, student performance and engagement diminish and have a long-term impact on students and society (Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2000; Gorski, 2013; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010). Lisa Delpit (2012) urges her readers to replace the mantra of “all children can learn” to “all children DO learn… some of them learn that we expect them to be successful, and some learn from us that they are dumb. Whatever we believe, they learn” (p. 101). Sonia Nieto (2002) and others (Banks, 1997; Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Darling-Hammond, Gay, 2000; 2010; Howard, 2006; hooks, 2000; Milner, 2010) have written at length about how teaching is not “separated from larger institutional practices and ideological realities in society, that is from the sociopolitical context of education. As educators—be they classroom teachers, school librarians, administrators, policymakers, or others—strive to create caring communities, they must also struggle to create a just society” (p. 29). This call to action leads to an investigation of mindset and the way this belief about traits and characteristics influences an individual’s view of challenges and opportunities.

**Mindset**

Alfred Binet developed the intelligence (IQ) test in France in the early 1900s. This test was requested by the French government as a way of identifying students that
would need additional support to be successful in public school and was later adapted for use in the United States by a Stanford University psychologist, Lewis Terman, in 1916 (Gladwell, 2008). The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale became the most common intelligence test in the United States and is still commonly used today. Current application of the instrument in the fields of education and psychology are often contrary to what Binet had intended. Binet developed the IQ test as an instrument to measure if the educational experiences of a child were working so that additional programs and services could be provided to improve the child’s learning and success in school. This is contrary to the current use of the IQ instrument in the United States and other countries that use this test as cumulative measure of a child’s static intelligence for special education and high-ability learner placement(s). Binet did not deny that there were individual differences of IQ. He argued that through experiences and opportunities to learn individuals could increase their IQ score since intelligence is malleable rather than static. “With practice, training, and above all, method, we manage to increase our attention, our memory, our judgment and literally to be come more intelligent than we were before” (Binet, 1909/1975, p. 107). After years of research, work with children, and classroom observations, Binet became increasingly concerned with how teachers were using the idea of intelligence. As Alfred Binet (1909/1975) wrote in Modern Ideas About Children, I have often observed, to my regret, that a widespread prejudice exists with regard to the educability of intelligence. The familiar proverb, ‘When one is stupid, it is for a long time,’ seems to be accepted indiscriminately by teachers with a stunted critical judgment. (p.105)
This idea of developed intelligence is also supported by modern day researchers such as Robert Sternberg. Sternberg (2014) argues that intelligence is “developing expertise— that it is merely one of many kinds of achieved forms of expertise” (p.17). In fact, neuroscience researchers have demonstrated that the brain has a great capacity to learn/grow throughout someone’s lifetime. Individual differences in intelligence do occur through genetics, environment, and experience; nevertheless, scientists now believe that roughly half of the brain’s general cognitive ability comes from heritability (Plomin, Haworth, Meaburn, Price, & Davis, 2013). In fact, neuroscientists have shown that when an individual puts forth great effort on a difficult task, the brain is actually building gray matter and strengthening pathways used to access information (Aydin et al., 2007; Ceccarelli et al., 2009). Many parents, educators, and administrators have very little awareness about what IQ tests even measure (Ricci, 2013). These cognitive assessments measure developed ability; therefore, students with limited opportunities to enhance their skills early on in their education end up with lower IQ and standardized test scores (Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2006). This can lead to inappropriate judgments by schools that also affect services, appropriate supports, expectations, and coursework.

Academics and educational researchers have long been reporting the need to address growing poverty and inequality that exists in schools (Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Gorski, 2013; Munin & Wise, 2012). Yet, the focus has traditionally been on students once they enter the school setting, there has been limited success. The problems associated with inequality and poverty affect students long before they walk into a school building (Carter &
Welner, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2014). Families struggling to raise children with limited financial resources also have limited opportunities. This causes a gap in what students know and can do in some educational areas before children enter school. This disparity continues to widen when the school environment, classroom instruction, and educational resources are not in place to effectively meet the needs of all children and account for individual differences (Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Duncan & Murnane, 2014).

Dweck (2008, 2010, 2012) argues that successful individuals (students, teachers, administrators) need a growth mindset to build their own skills and abilities throughout their lifetime. A growth mindset is also essential in shaping personal beliefs and values by allowing information and awareness to form more accurate perceptions of the self and of others. It is logical that this becomes important when working with all students, but particularly those struggling with poverty.

When people adopt a growth mindset about challenges, they see these situations as learning opportunities rather than threats (Dweck, 2008, 2010, 2012; Steele, 2010). Dweck writes extensively about how this mindset promotes motivation, learning, and success for both educators and students since challenges and setbacks are part of life. It is how these problems are approached that Dweck believes makes the difference. Educators with a fixed mindset who adopt a judgmental view and label students in poverty impact their students and significantly diminish their ability to support the learning of the child in the classroom (Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Dweck, 2008, 2010, 2012). In an interview in the Harvard Business Review, Dweck argued that employers need to do more to encourage a growth mindset in the workplace. Teachers,
managers, and leaders are learners too. They can model a growth mindset through personal example by developing their personal skills, abilities, and talent over a period of time through practice, goal setting, and effort (Dweck, 2012).

**Teacher Expectations**

Students from challenging backgrounds who come to school with access to limited resources and opportunities often start behind their peers, and as a result, are often judged as “missing something” (Banks, 1997; Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012). This deficit view perpetuates an unrealistic or inaccurate view of a child’s circumstances and drives pedagogical practices that are more teacher-driven, rather than student-centered (Banks, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Milner, 2010). Furthermore, studies by Smiley and Helfenbein, (2011) shed light on the fact that many school district and college preparatory programs engage in experiences, workshops, and instruction of adults that create and further perpetuate a deficit view of poverty. Gorski (2013) challenges these workshops and stresses the importance of focusing instead on student strengths and resilience. These beliefs affect expectations of students, strengthening a child’s potential to succeed. This also influences a child’s view of themselves (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Dweck’s extensive longitudinal research (2008) has shown that a significant number of children (about 40%) exhibit a growth mindset. Exposure to fixed mindset beliefs may change their beliefs due to the example set by adults in their life (teachers, administrators, and parents). This fixed mindset may perpetuate the cycle of poverty and limited potential (Dweck, January, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Milner, 2010).
Additionally, Hattie (2012), in his comprehensive research and meta-analysis of research and literature over time has identified the importance of the teacher-student relationship as a crucial factor in the development of a successful and supportive learning environment \( (d = 0.72) \). Relationships with students develop over time but rely on positive beliefs that are informed by accurate information, compassion, and accurate perceptions (Delpit, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Nieto, 2002, 2003). Building affirming student relationships and developing an encouraging classroom environment, which motivates and engages students, requires that teachers enter the classroom with these beliefs already in place or with the will and passion to learn new competencies (Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Delpit, 2012).

This is not to say that students with limited experiences and opportunities are less intelligent, lazy, or unmotivated, but rather there are inequitable learning experiences for students based upon many factors. The financial resources of parents to provide learning opportunities to young children can have a significant impact on both where students start in school and their motivation to progress (Burns, 2011; Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Gladwell, 2008; Milner, 2010; Ricci, 2013). Even Alfred Binet in the 1900s was able to point to the educational advantages that wealth and opportunity provide to some students, he wrote,

> If the wealth of children and parents does not enter the picture directly, it nevertheless constitutes an undeniable advantage for the student, since wealthier parents have more time to devote to the supervision of their children’s studies, feed them better, provide them with better hygiene, and
also collaborate more closely with the school than poor parents. (1911, p. 30)

Americans like to believe that they achieve things as a result of their merit in a classless society (Carter & Welner, 2013; Milner, 2010). This meritocracy ideology is also present in our school systems and the belief can create unintended barriers. Many scholars, educators, and authors are writing about the struggles of today’s students and families, noting that it takes a great deal more than hard work for young people to succeed (Banks, 1997; Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Gladwell, 2008; Gorski, 2013; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010; Munin & Wise, 2012; Tough, 2012).

When parents and educators make long-term judgments based upon IQ scores or standardized test scores, and assign labels for children such as poor, at-risk, underprivileged, or low income, assumptions may be made about the child and beliefs may create even more limits on student potential (Milner, 2010; Ricci, 2013). Gorski (2013) writes extensively about the negative stereotypes that he and others have identified as most common among teacher candidates. These stereotypes include that the poor: do not value education, are lazy, are substance abusers, are linguistically deficient, lack communication skills, and are inattentive/inactive parents. “If we can see all of the children we teach— skin color culture, learning styles, income level notwithstanding— as complete, deserving, brilliant human beings, then perhaps we will manage to create the educational system we need” (Delpit, 2012, p. 103). Perceptions and beliefs can become barriers for students often in the form of minimized expectations and biases that often go unchallenged and undetected (Banks, 1997; Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Gorski,
2008; 2013; Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010). Yet, as Binet (1909/1975) wrote, “Things can only be judged by their results and their destiny, no by their origin” (p. 197), emphasizing the importance of learning over time and the philosophy behind developed intelligence.

This stresses the importance of using IQ tests appropriately, but also highlights the significance of teacher beliefs and student expectations. Researchers and academics have studied the effect of teacher expectations on student performance for years. This is evident as far back as the late 1960s through Rosenthal and Jacobson’s *The Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968) to Kerman, Kimball, and Martin’s work with the Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) program in the 1980s. These studies were widely used to reduce disparity in educational achievement that could cause a self-fulfilling prophecy for students and perpetuate negative stereotypes, bias, and/or even prejudice by the teacher. It has been demonstrated that the belief in fixed traits and talent diminish success for students, both inside and outside of school (Banks, 1997; Binet, 1909/1975; Carter & Welner, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Gorski, 2008, 2013; Milner, 2010; Munin & Wise, 2012; Steele, 2010). The mindset of a teacher influences the mindset of students and subsequently the students’ beliefs about themselves (Delpit, 2012; Dweck, 2008, 2010, 2012; Milner, 2010). Therefore, it is important to consider how teacher and administrator perceptions and beliefs about poverty are related to mindset in order to improve the educational opportunities and care provided to all students in school.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the significance of the relationship between teachers’ and administrators’ awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset of student potential. Developing effective and able administrators and teachers who possess the skills and abilities to ensure that all children learn is becoming more challenging (Banks, 1997; Gorski, 2008, 2013). Students are more diverse and facing an increased number of economic challenges at home (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gorski, 2008, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) while teachers and administrators are predominantly middle-class European Americans who only speak English (Banks, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Educators must understand the cultures and experiences of students in order to develop a positive learning environment, so they must first possess the willingness, interest, and mindset to learn and value differences (Banks, 1997; Delpit, 2012; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003; Milner, 2010).

In this chapter, a description of the research design, participants, instrument, variables, research questions, data, and procedures are provided regarding this study of awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset.

Description of Project Methodology

For this research study, graduate students enrolled in a Midwest metropolitan public university Department of Educational Leadership’s June 2014 Summer LEAD Academy were asked to participate in a poverty awareness quiz (PAQ) developed by Paul Gorski (2013), perceptions of economic inequality (PEI) indicator used by Bamfield and Horton (2009), and mindset survey (MS) created and used extensively by Carol Dweck
Participants were asked to self-report their awareness of poverty and their perceptions of economic inequality by responding to a series of questions. They were also surveyed to investigate their mindset to provide a view of participants’ beliefs about students, effort, IQ, talent, and learning.

Participation to conduct this survey was applied for and permission was granted by the University of Nebraska Medical Center Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) reviewed the application for exempt educational, behavioral, and social science research. This project was exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 1 and 2. Therefore, permission was acquired to begin the project.

**Research Design**

Graduate students were offered an opportunity to complete this survey instrument during one of the first two days of the LEAD course at a metropolitan Midwestern public university. A cross-sectional survey instrument was chosen for this research design in order to reach as many students as possible in the shortest amount of time (Creswell, 2012). Given the time constraint of the four-day LEAD course, a survey was determined to be the best methodology. Through this exploratory research design, data were collected and analyzed to determine educator mindset in correlation to awareness of poverty and perceptions of economic inequality. A correlation is an appropriate statistical test in order to determine if there is a consistent pattern for the three aforementioned factors of the study (Creswell, 2012). Survey research such as this is used to learn more about the sample population in order to understand, plan, and recommend changes to programs, policies, and practices (Creswell, 2009). The survey instrument also contained open-ended questions to strengthen the information provided from participants and
expand the researcher’s understanding of graduate student perceptions. These open-ended questions asked participants the following:

1)- In your opinion, what is the main reason for poverty in the U.S.?
2)- In your opinion, what are the most effective policies that can help families in poverty?

These questions were used to explore the depth of participants’ thinking about poverty, given the complexity of the issue. Demographic data were collected and analyzed to compare the mean family income of educators’ home zip codes with that of the mean family income of the school community they designated as their home school. The home school is the location where the educator worked at the time the survey was taken. Demographic indicators identified the type of school (urban, suburban, or rural) in which the participants work.

Research Questions and Data Analysis

1. At the 2014 LEAD Academy (Leadership in Educational Administration), what were educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty as measured with the Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ)?

Data is presented through scores on a 10-item survey related to poverty in America. Table 1 displays central tendencies for the group of participants through an overall mean and standard deviation related to the ten-item Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ). This question was analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures and the results are displayed in Table 1.

2. What were participants’ perceptions as measured on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey?
Central tendencies are displayed in Table 2 through mean scores and standard deviations on the 7-item Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey.

3. What was the mindset participants have of talent and intelligence as measured on the Mindset survey (MS)?

Mean scores and standard deviations for items on the mindset (MS) survey are displayed on Table 3. This analysis used descriptive statistical measures.

4. How significant was the correlation among educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty (PAQ) and their mindset (MS)?

The significance of the relationship between the PAQ and MS was analyzed using Pearson’s $r$ Correlation with an alpha level of .05. Data is reported in Table 4.

5. What was the correlation between participants’ Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) raw score and the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey items?

The significance of the relationship between the PAQ and the PEI was analyzed using Pearson’s $r$ Correlation with an alpha level of .05. The results of the correlation between the PAQ and the PEI are displayed in Table 5.

6. What was the correlation between participants’ Mindset (MS) average total score and particular items on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI)?

The significance of the relationship between items on the PEI and the MS was analyzed using Pearson’s $r$ Correlation with an alpha level of .05. Data is reported in Table 6.

7. Was there a statistically significant difference on selected Mindset survey (MS) scores based on participant gender?
The significant difference of the means on particular items of the MS survey and gender were analyzed using a t-test with an alpha level set at .05. Data is reported in Table 7.

8. Was there a significant difference on Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) items based on participant gender?

The significant difference between particular items on the PEI and gender were analyzed using an independent sample t-test with an alpha level set at .05. Data is reported in a Table 8.

9. Was there a significant difference in the scores on a survey measuring perceptions of economic inequality (PEI) of participants who work in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to scores on the PEI of participants who work in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

The significant difference between particular items on the PEI and where participants work (either above or below the Nebraska average MFI) were analyzed using an independent sample t-test with an alpha level set at .05. Data is reported in a Table 9.

10. Was there a significant difference in the scores measuring perceptions of economic inequality (PEI) of participants who live in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to scores on the PEI of participants who live in an area where the median family income is above the Nebraska average MFI?

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine the difference between particular PEI items and where participants live (either above or below the Nebraska average MFI). This was analyzed with an alpha level set at .05. Data is reported in a Table 10.
11. Was there a significant difference in average total scores on the Mindset Survey (MS) of participants who work in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to average total scores on the MS of participants who work in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

An independent sample $t$-test was conducted to determine the difference between average total scores on the MS and where participants work (either above or below the Nebraska average MFI). This statistical measurement was analyzed with an alpha level set at .05. Data is reported in a Table 11.

12. Was there a significant difference in average total scores on the Mindset Survey (MS) of participants who live in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to average total scores on the MS of participants who live in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

An independent sample $t$-test was conducted to determine the difference between average total scores on the MS and where participants live (either above or below the Nebraska average MFI). This statistical measurement was analyzed with an alpha level set at .05. Data is reported in a Table 12.

Participants

Graduate students enrolled in the LEAD Academy course were asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used in selection of both the course and the site in order to learn more about participants’ awareness, perceptions, and mindset (Creswell, 2012). No individual identifiers were attached to the data of participating graduate students. Participants consisted of the summer 2014 graduate students admitted in UNO’s Department of Educational Leadership (EDL) program. All
adult participants have completed a Bachelors Degree and are pursuing a graduate degree, endorsement program, or receiving continuing education credit for certification. The single inclusion criterion was enrollment in either EDL 8050-School Community or EDL 8020-Educational Policy course. Both classes were part of summer LEAD Academy and are required for those pursuing their Masters Degree in Administration. No students present during this course when the survey was offered were excluded from participating. Demographics of the graduate students in this course were similar to those enrolled in other courses within the administrator preparation program at this university (K. Keiser, personal communication, August 25, 2014).

A minimum of 50 students was set as the preferred number of subjects. This minimum was exceeded. There were 71 participants in the study ($N = 71$). Naturally formed groups of adults were used based upon full completion of the three sections of the survey: PAC, PEI, and MS. Some of the adults who participated in the survey did not complete all sections of the demographic indicators; but the number of respondents was sufficient in order to conduct a correlational study using a survey to gather cross-sectional comparisons and analyze subjects’ perceptions of economic inequality, awareness of poverty, and mindset.

Of the total number of identified subjects who attended the LEAD course and completed the demographic section of the survey (with one non-respondent), 24 identified as male (34%), 46 (65%) self-selected female, and no participants identified as transgender or other. There were no enrollment restrictions based on gender.

Age identification on the survey listed six age-range categories between 29 to 60 years old. These categories were narrowed down to three age categories. This
demographic indicator allowed for a comparison of the three factors (awareness of poverty-PAC, perceptions of economic inequality-PEI, and mindset-MS) on the basis of age with 50% of the total participants indicating they were 34 years or younger and 50% of the participants selecting their age as 35 years or older. The majority of participants were between the ages of 30 to 50 years old with one non-respondent. No children (18 years of age or younger) were used in this research study.

Participants were asked to write in their self-selected race and/or ethnic identification. Seventy-six percent recorded White or Caucasian. Seven percent identified as African American or Black, and 1% identified as Pacific Islander. There were 11 participants that chose not to complete this portion of the demographic survey (16%). No enrollment restrictions based upon race or ethnicity was placed on participants through this study or through enrollment in the graduate courses.

Through this project, participants were asked to indicate their perception of their economic status background to the following questions: Growing up my family was: 1) Poor, 2) Relatively poor, 3) Lower-middle class, 4) Upper-middle class, 5) Upper class, or 6) Wealthy. There was small variation among these six categories; therefore, the levels were collapsed into three smaller categories of Poor, Middle Class, and Wealthy. Of the total number of subjects that completed this economic indicator (with one non-respondent), 12 participants (17%) selected that they grew up poor or relatively poor, 57 (80%) chose Lower to Upper-middle class, and 1 (1%) indicated that they grew up in an Upper-class or Wealthy environment.

Participants were asked to indicate where they perceived their current economic position in society by responding to the following: Now, I currently consider myself: 1)
Poor, 2) Relatively poor, 3) Lower-middle class, 4) Upper-middle class, 5) Upper class, or 6) Wealthy. Because this survey explored participants’ awareness of poverty, perceptions of inequality, and mindset, it was important to know where the majority of participants subjectively placed themselves within the socio-economic continuum. From this perspective, participants viewed questions about class and poverty from their current position in society.

Of the total number of participants that responded (one non-respondent), one subject (1%) perceived himself/herself as Poor while 97 participants (97%) perceived themselves as Middle-class. Therefore, the majority of participants consider themselves to be Middle-class, which is congruent with the national demographic profile of other teachers and administrators (Banks, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Howard, 2006). Participants in this study viewed questions about class and poverty on the instrument from their “middle” socio-economic position in society.

In this study, subjects were asked to provide their home address zip code and the zip code of their school/work address. Using the American Community Survey data (2012) from the last five years from The U.S. Census Bureau, the Median Family Income (MFI) from both the home and work zip code areas were compared to the overall Nebraska MFI to determine if the home MFI or the work MFI are either above or below the 2012 Nebraska state MFI of $64,820 (+/- $371).

At the time of the survey, 41 (48 %) of the participants in the study lived in areas where the MFI was above $64,820 and 23 (27%) of the participants lived in areas below the Nebraska MFI. Seven participants did not provide their home zip codes. Moreover, 28 (55 %) of the participants in the study worked in areas that were above $64,820 and 23
(45%) of the participants worked in areas below the Nebraska MFI. There were 20 subjects that did not provide their work zip codes on the instrument.

On the survey instrument, participants were asked to indicate their current employment status by selecting if they currently worked as a teacher, administrator, university staff, or other category. Subjects indicated their program of study (either masters, doctoral, or other). The “other” category could indicate those taking the course for certification hours as part of continuing education for the purpose of state re-certification. Finally, the subjects enrolled in this course selected the category of students with which they currently work.

The majority of participants worked in public schools (78%), 6% worked in private schools, and 16% of respondents reported that they did not currently working in a school setting. Forty-eight subjects (69%) are employed as teachers, seven (10%) of participants indicated they currently worked as administrators, four (6%) selected university staff, 11 (16%) selected “other,” and there was one non-respondent. Approximately 40% were pursuing their Masters Degree at the time of the course, 31% were enrolled in a doctoral program, and 21% selected “other”. The “other” category could have been an indication of those taking the course for certification hours as part of continuing education for the purpose of state re-certification. The subjects enrolled in this course also worked with students in a variety of categories: 6% Pre/K, 20% K-5th grade, 14% 6-8th grade, 34% high school, 17% adults, and 4% work with students receiving special education services.
Instrumentation

There were three quantitative sections of this survey that were combined for use as one instrument for this research project.

**Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ).** The Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) was developed and used by Paul Gorski (2013). This portion of the instrument measured participants’ awareness of U.S. poverty through a series of ten questions about poverty. Participants received one point/multiple-choice question where they are able to identify the correct answer. This section of the survey was tabulated using an overall raw score ranging from 0-10. A raw score of ten indicated that the participant correctly identified the right answer to all of the ten questions on the PAQ. For example, one item on the PAQ asked: According to the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF, 2010) how often is a child born into poverty in the U.S.? A.) Every 32 seconds B.) Every three minutes and two seconds or C.) Every 32 minutes. Each question was about some area of U.S. poverty and participants were asked to try their best. The PAQ reliability was indicated by each of the ten questions referencing the source of the poverty information. These questions were used verbatim in the survey for LEAD participants.

As Gorski (2013) writes in his book, *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty* (which introduces the Poverty Awareness Quiz), “The purpose of the quiz is not to measure which statistics you’ve memorized, but instead to provide a broad picture of how your general perceptions about class and poverty in the United States do or do not jibe with reality” (p.35). Gorski explains why he developed the Poverty Awareness Quiz in his book and acknowledges that poverty is a large and complex societal problem. In fact, many educators may feel that battling the growth of national and global poverty is outside
of their circle of influence, given that many teachers work every day to support and teach growing numbers of hungry students in their classrooms. However, Gorski and other scholars (Darling-Hammond, 2010, Nieto & Bode, 2012) believe that when teachers and administrators understand poverty more they are growing in solidarity and understanding of their students and families.

**Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI).** Section Two of the instrument is the PEI. This part of the survey was developed and used by Louise Bamfield and Tim Horton and was published in a June 2009 report called *Understanding Attitudes to Tackling Economic Inequality* through research funds from The Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The purpose of their research was to explore “the underlying ‘drivers’ of public attitudes towards economic inequality and welfare policy” (p. 1). Bamfield and Horton surveyed people in the United Kingdom (UK) to determine their general beliefs about people in poverty, those with wealth, and the opportunities for upward mobility. There are seven questions in this section that participants responded to by using a 5-point Likert scale with (1) indicating Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree. These questions were changed to focus participants on their view of the U.S. rather than on the UK and were tabulated by scores on each individual question. Participants respond to items such as:

1.) There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socioeconomic groups and ethnic groups.

2.) Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.
Bamfield and Horton (2009) conducted their research project between July 2008 and January 2009 in four metropolitan locations around the UK. The participants were between 25 and 65 years old, from a varied range of socio-economic positions, and indicated a wide range of political party affiliations. The developers of the study used “a three-stage research design combining deliberative and more traditional research methods. At the outset, three exploratory focus groups were used to explore ideas, test language, and refine working hypotheses in order to formulate subsequent stimulus material” (p.10). Their main body of the research used focus groups to test responses in order to gather quantitative data that was representative of the overall population of the UK. The sample groups that were used to field test the survey instruments ranged from 2,044 to 3,310 adults. “Quantitative data allowed us to explore more precisely the prevalence and strength of attitudes on specific issues, the relationship between attitudes on different issues, the existence of distinct sets of attitudes within the population, and the effects of variables such as household income and geographical location on attitudes to economic inequality and welfare policy” (Bamfield & Horton, 2009, p. 10).

**Mindset Survey (MS).** The Mindset Survey was developed, and has been used extensively, by Carol Dweck and other scholars since 1988. This instrument has been validated and the implicit theory (growth mindset) measure is also reliable (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). Permission was granted from Dweck in May 2014 to use the MS instrument in this exploratory research study.

In this project, participants’ Mindset (either growth or fixed) is measured on a 6-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). Individual scores were tabulated and calculated for an average total score. Scores on the 16-question
survey of 4 or more indicated a growth mindset. Subjects with average scores of 2.99 or lower were classified as having a fixed mindset about intelligence and traits. Participants with average total scores of 3 or higher and lower than 4.99 were categorized as neither fixed nor growth mindset. These scores indicated mixed beliefs about intelligence and talent (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). Items on the survey relate to beliefs about intelligence and talent such as:

1.) You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can’t really do much to change it.
2.) To be honest, you can’t really change how much talent you have.

**Description of Procedures**

Social justice and poverty awareness have been added to the LEAD course content, but none of the survey questions were addressed directly through instruction or course content prior to the delivery of the participant survey. Participants provided responses to the three sections of the survey instrument via paper format during opening class activities of LEAD Academy. Participants had the opportunity to select their own seat in the classroom so their privacy was protected. This gave subjects the opportunity to turn in a blank survey instrument. This survey was one of several pre-class warm-up activities in which students chose to engage. Participants and the investigator had continued interactions throughout the duration of the course and through additional coursework, but there were no further interactions with participants about this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the significance of the relationship between educators’ awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset about student potential. Economic inequality is on the rise for many students and families across the country. This is the same for families in Nebraska. Wealth and assets are accumulating for a smaller portion of the population, which disproportionately allows this group to influence political outcomes and cause an imbalance of power within the social, economic, and political system (Domhoff, 2012). Along with increased levels of economic inequality, declining incomes for the majority of the U.S. population and rising costs have caused the majority of Americans to be less financially stable. The effects of growing economic inequality and instability are also seen in school districts and classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

As this inequality gap widens, so do poverty rates. There are more children living in poverty now than any time since the 1970s. Poverty limits a child’s access to basic needs, but also impacts opportunities, resources, and school performance. School funding has not increased in order to keep up with growing student needs, therefore, the systems of support that are put in place to assist families within the school environment also become strained. The failures of the support system have a long-term impact on the lives of students (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

There is also evidence that the majority of individuals in the U.S. significantly underestimate current level of economic and wealth disparity. This further complicates the potential for economic mobility, especially if the majority of the population views the
struggle of others as “their fault.” Due to these trends and the implications of inaccurate perceptions both inside and outside of school, it is important to consider how educators (both teachers and administrators) view economic opportunities and to explore how their perceptions are related to their mindset of student potential. While educators are not any more responsible for problems related to poverty than are other members of the community, inaccurate beliefs and perceptions can lead to negatively stereotyping students and their families. These false beliefs can have implications that can further limit a student’s success in school and can negatively their future. Any long-term and sustainable solution to poverty will not be fully possible without addressing the bigger issues of economic injustice within society (Gorski, 2013). However, this does not mean that schools and teachers should not attempt to raise the awareness of poverty and minimize the effects within the school setting.

To explore teacher and administrator awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset a three-part survey was conducted during a summer graduate-level course. Surveys were provided to course participants as a voluntary, first-day activity during the 2014 LEAD Academy (Leadership in Educational Administration). Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 utilized descriptive statistics and 71 participants completed the sections of the survey used for these questions. The remaining questions were inferential and participants varied from 71 to 51 depending upon the question. Questions 4, 5, and 6 were analyzed by a correlation to consider the significance of the relationship between the three sections of the survey. Questions 7 through 12 analyzed the significance of these same survey sections to additional factors.
such as gender and the Median Family Income (MFI) of where the participant worked and lived through a $t$-test comparison of differences for significance.

**Research Question #1.** At the 2014 LEAD (Leadership in Educational Administration) Academy, what were educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty as measured with the Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) as seen in Section One of the survey instrument?

The highest score possible on this section of the instrument would have been a raw score of 10. Each participant was assigned a score based upon the number of his or her correct responses to the 10 multiple-choice questions contained on the PAQ. Question 5 asks, “One in ten White children in the U.S. is poor according to the CDF (2008). What proportion of Latino children in the U.S. is poor?” The responses that participants could choose from were: A.) One in four, B.) One in six, or C.) One in ten. The correct response was A.) One in four.

As seen in the descriptive statistics displayed in Table 1, the majority of participants’ individual raw scores were relatively low in order for the overall mean to be low ($M = 4.21, SD = 1.34$). The majority of participants got 3-5 of the 10 questions correct. One individual received the highest score of 8. The overall results indicate that most participants have low awareness of various aspects of U.S. poverty and the complexities that exist for economically challenged students and families across the country that face different, yet significant struggles.

**Research Question #2.** What were participants’ perceptions as measured with the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey?
On the PEI, there were six separate statements describing economic opportunities for people within the U.S. today. Participants were asked to what extent they either agreed or disagreed with each statement by indicating their response on a 5-point Likert scale; a higher number indicated more agreement to the statement. The means and standard deviations listed in Table 2 indicate that the majority of participants agreed that there are a number of significant barriers to opportunity facing people in the U.S. today. For example, questions 11 and 12 seek to identify an individual’s perceptions of disadvantages and opportunities in relation to others, acknowledging (in their view) that effort alone may not be enough to overcome disadvantages.

Responses to question 12, “Many people are disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face” identified a solid agreement among participants with the highest mean and lowest standard deviation ($M = 3.83, SD = 0.81$). Similar responses to Question 13, “Many people are severely disadvantaged…” ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.00$) further emphasize this agreement. In addition, the participants in the survey seemed to concur with Question 17 “Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups” ($M = 3.52, SD = 0.92$). Participants showed less agreement about the “ordinary people in the middle” ($M = 3.38, SD = 0.95$) and the “rich people at the top” ($M = 2.41, SD = 0.95$) who have a “tough time due to more stress and more responsibility.”

**Research Question #3.** What was the mindset participants had of talent and intelligence as measured on the Mindset Survey (MS)?
First, the MS scores of each individual participant (\(N = 71\)) were averaged in order to determine the number of individuals that could be identified as having either a growth, fixed, or unidentified mindset. Two participants’ average total scores fell within the growth mindset category, 48 were categorized as fixed mindset, and 21 were neither growth nor fixed mindset. Therefore, approximately 68% of the participants in the study had a fixed mindset as categorized by the MS. Dweck (2006) describes an individual with a fixed mindset as someone that believes that talent and intelligence are “fixed” traits that cannot be improved with effort. In other words, “from the point of view of the fixed mindset, effort is only for people with deficiencies” (p. 42).

Second, the means and standard deviations for participants’ responses on the 16-item Mindset (MS) survey were calculated. These averages range from \(M = 2.23\) to \(M = 4.45\) and \(SD = 0.93\) to \(SD = 1.33\). Results indicate that mean scores on particular items all fell within the fixed mindset to neither growth nor fixed mindset range. The MS (Section Three of the survey instrument) used a 6-point Likert Scale, and the descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 3. The higher the score the more the participant agreed with the statement. Items that were worded negatively were transposed to aid interpretation. Question 2, “Your intelligence is something about you that you can’t change very much.” had the lowest mean of all 16 questions, and a standard deviation toward the lower range in comparison to others (\(M = 2.23, SD = 1.04\)). Question 3, “No matter who you are, you can significantly change your intelligence level” had the highest mean of all 16 questions, and the second to lowest standard deviation in comparison to other items (\(M = 4.30, SD = 1.04\)). In response to Question 4, “To be honest, you can’t really change how intelligent you are,” participants’ scores showed the second lowest mean score within the fixed
mindset range and also the smallest standard deviation \((M = 2.28, SD = 0.93)\). Similarly on Question 12 regarding talent, participants responded in agreement to the following: “To be honest, you can’t really change how much talent you have” \((M = 2.41, SD = 1.12)\).

**Research Question #4.** How significant was the correlation between educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty (PAQ) and their mindset (MS)?

The inferential statistics reported in Table 4 display participants’ responses comparing two sets of scores from Section One (PAQ) and Section Three (MS) of the survey instrument to see if there is a significant correlation between participants’ scores.

The results indicate there was little if any relationship \((r = .08, p = 0.52)\) between participants overall score on the Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) and their Mindset (MS) average total score.

**Research Question #5.** What was the correlation between participants’ Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) raw score and the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey items?

Table 5 displays the results of the correlation between the PAQ total raw scores and average scores on PEI items. There was no relationship indicated between the PAQ and the PEI on all items. Cohen’s \(d\) values range from \(r = .04\) to \(r = .16\) with all \(p\) values greater than .05.

**Research Question #6.** What was the correlation between participants’ Mindset (MS) average total score and particular items on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI)?
The results are reported on Table 6 and compared participant scores on six separate statements on the PEI to average total mindset scores per item. None of the items were significant at the .05 level; nonetheless, scores were different when participants responded to questions about the rich and the poor. When participants shared their perceptions about the “poor” there was a negligible relationship \((r = .06, p > .05)\). When asked to respond regarding their perceptions about the “rich” participants indicated a weak positive relationship \((r = .02, p > .05)\).

**Research Question #7.** Was there a statistically significant difference on selected Mindset (MS) scores based on participant gender?

The results of the independent sample \(t\)-test are displayed in Table 7. Two of the items were significant at \(p < .01\) and two additional items were significant at less than or equal to .05. Effect sizes for all four items fell within the moderate range \((d = 0.51 \text{ to } d = 0.76)\). The two items that were the most different between male and female participants were items seven and eleven. Item seven asked participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following, “No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit” \((t(68) = 2.70, p < .01, \text{ two-tailed}, d = 0.68)\). Item 11 asked for agreement or disagreement to the statement, “No matter who you are, you can significantly change your level of talent” \((t(68) = 3.04, p < .01, \text{ two-tailed}, d = 0.76)\).

**Research Question #8.** Was there a significant difference on Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) items based on participant gender?

The results of the independent sample \(t\)-test are displayed in Table 8. Two of the seven items were significant at \(p < .01\) and the other five items were not significant. The two items that were the most different between male and female participants were
Questions 11 and 14, with females scoring significantly higher than males. Question 11 asked participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree), “There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups”( $t (58) = 3.15, p < .01$, two-tailed, $d = 0.45$). Question 14 asked for agreement or disagreement on the following, “Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated” ($t (68) = 2.75, p = .01$, two-tailed, $d = 0.71$).

**Research Question #9.** Was there a significant difference in scores measuring the perceptions of economic inequality (PEI) of participants who work in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to scores on the PEI of participants who work in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

The results of the independent sample $t$-test reported in Table 9 indicate there was no statistically significant difference between participants’ agreement or disagreement to various items on the PEI and to whether the participant worked in areas that were above or below the Nebraska MFI of $64,820$. Effect sizes for all items were from 0.00 to 0.48. Question 13 asked participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following, “Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face” ($t (49)= 0.23, p > .05$, two-tailed, $d = 0.06$). Question 17 asked for agreement or disagreement to the statement, “Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and
with more stress and anxiety than other groups” \( (t (49) = 0.62, p > .05, \text{two-tailed}, d = 0.17) \).

**Research Question #10.** Was there a significant difference in scores measuring perceptions of economic inequality (PEI) of participants who live in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to scores on the PEI of participants who live in an area where the median family income is above the Nebraska average MFI?

As indicated in the results of the independent sample \( t \)-test displayed in Table 10, there was no statistically significant difference between participants’ agreement or disagreement to various items on the PEI and to whether the participant lived in an area either above or below the Nebraska MFI of $64,820. Effect sizes for all items fell within the range of 0.00 to 0.52. Question 13 asked participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following, “Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face” \( (t (49) = 1.84, p > .05, \text{two-tailed}, d = 0.52) \). Similarly, Question 15 asked for agreement or disagreement to the statement, “Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor” \( (t (49) = 0.00, p > .05, \text{two-tailed}, d = 0.00) \) and had no statistical significance.

**Research Question #11.** Was there a significant difference in average total scores on the Mindset Survey (MS) of participants who work in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to average total
scores on the MS of participants who work in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

Results of the independent sample $t$-test displayed in Table 11 indicate there was no statistically significant difference between participants’ average total scores on the MS and whether the participant worked in an area either above or below the Nebraska MFI ($t (49) = 0.12, p > .05$, two-tailed, $d = 0.04$).

**Research Question #12.** Was there a significant difference in average total scores on the Mindset Survey (MS) of participants who live in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to average total scores on the MS of participants who live in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI?

Results of the independent sample $t$-test displayed in Table 12 indicate there was no statistically significant difference between participants’ average total scores on the MS and whether the participant lived in an area either above or below the Nebraska MFI ($t (62) = 1.32, p > .05$, two-tailed, $d = 0.37$).
Table 1

*Raw Score on 10-item Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ten = ten correct responses on the PAQ; One = one correct response on the PAQ
Table 2

*Descriptive Statistic for the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 11. There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12. Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 13. Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14: Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15: Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 16: Rich people at the top have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, with more stress and more responsibility than other groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Strongly Agree = (5), Agree = (4), Neither Agree nor Disagree = (3), Disagree = (2), Strongly Disagree = (1)
Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Mindset Survey (MS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindset Questions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1. You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can’t really do much</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to change it. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2. Your intelligence is something about you that you can’t change very</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3. No matter who you are, you can significantly change your intelligence</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level. (Neither Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4. To be honest, you can’t really change how intelligent you are. (Fixed</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are. (Neither</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6. You can learn new things, but you can’t really change your basic</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligence. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite a bit. (Neither Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 8. You can change even your basic intelligence level considerably. (Neither</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 9. You have a certain amount of talent and you can’t really do much to</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change it. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 10. Your talent in an area is something about you that you can’t change</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very much. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 11. No matter who you are, you can significantly change your level of</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talent. (Neither Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (Continued)

*Descriptive Statistics for Mindset Survey (MS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 12. To be honest, you can’t really change how much talent you have. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 13. You can always substantially change how much talent you have. (Neither Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14. You can learn new things, but you can’t really change your basic level of talent. (Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15. No matter how much talent you have, you can always change it quite a bit. (Neither Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 16. You can change even your basic level of talent considerably. (Neither Growth nor Fixed Mindset)</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Strongly Agree (6), Disagree (5), Mostly Disagree (4), Mostly Agree (3), Agree (2), Strongly Agree (1)*
Table 4

*Correlation between Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) and Mindset (MS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindset</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAQ</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Correlation between Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) Raw Score and Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>$r$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 11. There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12. Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 13. Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14: Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15: Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 16: Rich people at the top have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, with more stress and more responsibility than other groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

*Correlation between Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Items and Mindset (MS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 11. There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12. Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 13. Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14: Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15: Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 16: Rich people at the top have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, with more stress and more responsibility than other groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Significance of Mindset (MS) Based on Participant Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindset</th>
<th>Males (N = 24)</th>
<th>Females (N = 46)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Total Score</td>
<td>4.23, .65</td>
<td>4.60, .86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t = 2.03, p = .05, d = 0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

Significance of Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Based on Participant Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 11. There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12. Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 13. Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14: Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15: Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor.</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (Continued)

Significance of Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Based on Participant Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 16: Rich people at the top have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, with more stress and more responsibility than other groups.</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Significance of Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Scores on Selected Items
Based on Where Participants Work and Whether the Area is Above or Below the
Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>Below MFI (N = 23)</th>
<th>Above MFI (N = 28)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 11. There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>3.17 0.98</td>
<td>2.68 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t 1.69 p &gt; .05 d 0.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12. Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>3.87 0.87</td>
<td>3.93 0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t 0.26 p &gt; .05 d 0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 13. Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>3.65 1.03</td>
<td>3.71 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t 0.23 p &gt; .05 d 0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14: Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
<td>3.65 0.98</td>
<td>3.32 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t 1.11 p &gt; .05 d 0.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15: Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor.</td>
<td>3.26 0.81</td>
<td>3.29 1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t 0.10 p &gt; .05 d 0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 (Continued)

Significance of Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Scores on Selected Items

Based on Where Participants Work and Whether the Area is Above or Below the Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>Below MFI (N = 23)</th>
<th>Above MFI (N = 28)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 16: Rich people at the top have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, with more stress and more responsibility than other groups.</td>
<td>2.43 1.08</td>
<td>2.32 0.86</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups.</td>
<td>3.52 0.95</td>
<td>3.68 0.86</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10

*Significance of Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) scores on Selected Items Based on Where Participants Live and Whether the Area is Above or Below the Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>Below MFI</th>
<th>Above MFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( (N = 23) )</td>
<td>( (N = 28) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 11.</strong> There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
<td>3.22 1.00</td>
<td>2.85 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.85 1.32</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 12.</strong> Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>4.09 0.42</td>
<td>3.76 0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.76 1.60</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 13.</strong> Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
<td>3.87 0.69</td>
<td>3.39 1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.39 1.84</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 14:</strong> Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
<td>3.65 0.98</td>
<td>3.46 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.46 0.73</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 15:</strong> Ordinary people in the middle have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, but without the rewards of the rich and without the benefits of the poor.</td>
<td>3.39 0.89</td>
<td>3.39 0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.39 0.00</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 (Continued)

**Significance of Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) scores on Selected Items**

**Based on Where Participants Live and Whether the Area is Above or Below the Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEI Questions</th>
<th>Below MFI</th>
<th>Above MFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( (N = 23) )</td>
<td>( (N = 28) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 16: Rich people at the top have a really tough time overall, because they work hard, with more stress and more responsibility than other groups.</td>
<td>2.61 1.03</td>
<td>2.24 0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( t = 1.50 )</td>
<td>( p &gt; .05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( d = 0.38 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Poor people at the bottom have a really tough time overall, because they work hard but without the rewards of the rich or the middle, and with more stress and anxiety than other groups.</td>
<td>3.78 0.85</td>
<td>3.32 0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( t = 1.94 )</td>
<td>( p &gt; .05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( d = 0.51 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

*Significance of Mindset (MS) Average Total Score Based on Where participants Work and Whether the Area is Above or Below the Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below MFI (N = 23)</th>
<th>Above MFI (N = 28)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MS average total score</strong></td>
<td>4.43 .83</td>
<td>4.40 .80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>t</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>p</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 12

Significance of Mindset (MS) average total score based on where participants live and whether the area is above or below the Nebraska Median Family Income (MFI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below MFI (N = 23)</th>
<th>Above MFI (N = 28)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS average total score</td>
<td>M = 3.37, SD = .28</td>
<td>M = 3.27, SD = .47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t = .85, p &gt; .05</td>
<td>p = .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d = 0.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE
Conclusions and Discussion

While it will take significant societal change and a long-term plan to reduce poverty and economic injustice, students living in poverty deserve to have the best efforts from their teachers and schools now. As studies have shown (Norton & Ariely, 2011), the majority of Americans may be unaware of the current disparity of wealth and how this has contributed to growing poverty. Studies from the United Kingdom (Bamfield & Horton, 2009) also demonstrate that most people assign blame and negative stereotypes to the poor. Educators must be aware of the emerging needs of their economically disadvantaged students and be prepared to respond quickly and effectively.

A lack of awareness, inaccurate perception, and fixed mindset may pose further barriers to improving the opportunities for all U.S. students as poverty continues to grow, needs become more diverse, and students continue to be different in race and ethnicity from the majority of their teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Delpit, 2012). Responding to the diverse needs of all students can be challenging, particularly because low-income students, their communities, and schools are all unique and often very different from one another. Paul Gorski (2013) cautions against any attempt at a “quick fix” approach or hoping for a “magic bullet.” Rather, after an extensive review of literature and research, he warns against accepting the notion that any one approach will work for all low-income students everywhere. Instead, Gorski suggests that schools use what they know about their students and communities to make decisions that are the best. Lisa Delpit (2012) further emphasizes the importance of “diverse teachers collaborating around teaching and learning” in order to know how to best monitor and assess children, particularly those
students from cultures different from the teacher’s (p. 141). It is evident from the participants in this research study that forming a diverse group of teachers would be challenging in this metropolitan area. They simply did not exist in the study and typically are not present in other graduate courses within Educational Leadership at this metropolitan university.

Duncan and Murnane (2014) state, “There is ample evidence that simply spending more money is not an adequate strategy for educational improvement” (p. 143). Yet, these same authors acknowledge that additional, targeted resources are necessary to support meaningful improvement for “disadvantaged students.” One of the most important resources that make a difference in the lives of students are high-quality and caring teachers and administrators. It is essential that these important people have an awareness of the challenges their students encounter, have accurate perceptions about the environment that influences the lives of students in the classroom, and a growth mindset that believes with effort all people can change their basic level of intelligence and talent. An increase in awareness, accurate perceptions, and a growth mindset is not necessarily achieved through more money.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the awareness of poverty, perceptions of economic inequality, and mindset of teachers and administrators. The study combined these three, different components of previous research conducted separately by Gorski (2013), Bamfield and Horton (2009), and Dweck (2012) into an exploratory instrument. Surveys were completed voluntarily by graduate students attending a Midwestern public metropolitan university in the summer of 2014. Approximately 80% \((N = 71)\) of these
adult students completed the survey. The twelve research questions referenced in this study were analyzed through a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. The first three questions refer to descriptive statistics questions. Questions 4 through 6 look for significant relationships through a correlational analysis. The final research questions (7 through 12) were analyzed through independent sample t-tests to identify significant differences in various factors.

This chapter presents the conclusions and a discussion of the findings of this research study, the significance of these findings, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

Research Question 1 measured educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty on the Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ). Although overall awareness of U.S. poverty was low for the sample group \((M = 4.21, SD = 1.34)\) and yielded an insignificant correlation to the Mindset Survey (MS) and the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Survey, this portion of the survey instrument did provide some general information about the participants as a whole. Findings suggest that the participants of this study, many of whom were teachers and administrators, would benefit from professional learning opportunities that would expand their awareness of U.S., state, and community poverty.

The poverty rates of various ethnic and racial groups in the U.S. is of particular importance given the wide diversity of the general population in this metropolitan area when compared to the homogeneous demographics of this participant sample population. Although the rate of minority poverty rates is increasing slower in the Midwest than other areas of the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a), Latino and African American children
experience higher rates of poverty in this metropolitan area. Many of the teachers and administrators that participated in the study would benefit from knowing this so that they are better able to understand and connect to students and their families.

In fact, of the 63 participants that responded to the open-ended question asking participants to state their opinion regarding the main reason for poverty in the U.S., 24 people (38%) listed a lack of education or an educational issue as the main cause for poverty. Referencing “a lack of education” as the main cause of poverty may seem like a natural and logical response from a group of educators. Many of these participants are perhaps familiar with the national statistics regarding the correlation between future salary and achieved education levels (Carter & Welner, 2013; Duncan & Murnane, 2014), but this may also indicate a lack of awareness and understanding regarding the complexities and diversity of poverty and the differences that exist based upon race and ethnicity. It also calls attention to an interesting issue for further investigation. Why is it that roughly a third of teacher and administrative participants believe that a poor education is the main cause of poverty? Were subjects indicating a problem within the educational system or a lack of awareness and understanding of the complex nature of poverty? These responses could be further analyzed in future research for a comparison to Gorski’s (2013) previously identified stereotypes most commonly found in pre-service teachers.

Relating the cause of poverty to individual matters of control may also impair teacher and administrators from viewing the strengths of people struggling in poverty. Instead, results may indicate a desire of educators “blaming the poor” for their struggles, ignoring the privileges afforded to some groups of people and not to others while
minimizing the responsibilities of citizens to support one another in the community. This deficit view was evident in the majority of participant responses to the open-ended questions on the survey instrument. Three participants indicated that the main reason for poverty was a lack of “motivation” for people wanting to work; while several others stated that the “system enables poverty” through an “entitlement of welfare.” One participant responded that in their opinion “terrible parents, single parent households, and a lack of education” cause poverty. When asked about policies that reduce poverty, one subject stated that society should “reduce welfare amounts, stop enabling people.” In contrast, relatively few comments reflected the opinion of this individual that “oppression, people in power, big corporations want to keep it that way” in reference to the cause of poverty. Nor did many participants mention, “early intervention, job skills, early childhood programs, qualified teachers” as one individual listed in response to effective policies that help families in poverty. This may be a topic to discuss through future focus groups in order to understand this response more deeply and completely.

Furthermore, it may be interesting for further research to review the scores of specific questions on the PAQ that relate to the most common aspect of poverty in the area of this university to determine if participant awareness was greater for local issues. Additionally, it would be valuable to consider if information, content, or personal stories were more effective in raising participants’ awareness of poverty. A pre-test to post-test paired sample $t$-test comparison may be worthwhile if aspects of poverty are covered in course content and/or experiences with the same group of students during this graduate course in the future.
Question 2 explores participants’ perceptions of economic inequality within the United States. While participants appear to generally recognize barriers to progress through the PEI for various segments of the population, these results may also indicate the difficulty people have understanding the struggles of others in comparison to themselves. For example, there was a relatively small difference in overall scores when participants were asked to consider the difficulties of “poor people” and “people in the middle” and similarly when comparing the “middle” to “rich people at the top.” This may indicate the overall strength of personal perspective and life-experience in shaping an individual’s sense of reality. Certainly many educators in this metropolitan area are exposed to the visible existence of poverty or economic inequality in the community, but perhaps this reality is not visible enough to impact participant perceptions. Or is their reality simply altered in view of their individual perspective? Again, a follow up study involving participant interviews or case studies may be a valuable method to explore these underlying questions related to how participants form their perceptions of economic inequality and the individual barriers to progress experienced by some and not others.

Question 3 explored participants’ mindset. On all items of the MS in Section Three of the instrument, participants identified as having a relatively fixed mindset about talent and intelligence. The 16-question MS that was developed by Carol Dweck (2010) was intended to identify those with either a growth mindset or a fixed mindset. To determine these two distinct categories, average total scores of 5 and 6 are considered growth, while scores of 1 and 2 indicate a fixed mindset. Dweck’s scoring guidelines (2006) for the survey also point out that the middle scores of 3 and 4 are to be removed because they are considered neither growth nor fixed.
Overall the 16 questions on the MS indicate that adult participants in this research study generally agreed that talent and intelligence are set traits that do not change. Only two of the participants (3%) in this study ($N = 71$) had individual average scores that would categorize them as having a growth mindset. This is a strong indication of fixed mindset beliefs among group participants. The scores are not consistent with the overall scores of undergraduate college students and children (Dweck, 2006), though, no additional research studies were identified to compare these scores with specific graduate level or teacher participant groups within the United States.

Given the current attention paid to the importance of standardized testing and intelligence tests in public schools rather than learning and progress, perhaps these findings are not surprising. It may be that participants from the U.S. or the Midwest with a fixed mindset either chose teaching/administration as a career, or that educators become more or less fixed in their mindset as they develop within their career. This may also be the overall view of those of the middle-class as it relates to up-bringing and/or personal experience.

Question 4 examined the significance of the correlation between educators’ awareness of U.S. poverty (PAQ) and their mindset (MS). The strength of this correlation was not significant and was perhaps influenced by the fact that there were so few participants that scored in the growth mindset category. Findings demonstrate that there is no significant relationship between participants’ awareness of poverty and their mindset of intelligence and talent. It is interesting that those with higher mindset scores do not have a greater awareness of poverty. Many teachers and administrators may know how many students in their building or class are labeled under the “free and reduced
lunch” category, but they may not fully understand their students’ family experiences that have led them to apply for the federal school lunch program. This may speak to a general lack of awareness of how poverty is complex and affects individual families in different ways. Since there is no relationship to mindset, perhaps an educator’s mindset is more determined by educational training and personal beliefs rather than the students a teacher has worked with over the years. It would be interesting for further study to explore how a group of growth mindset teachers working in a school with a lower socio-economic student population would score on the PAQ and PEI and, more specifically, to conduct further qualitative research in an attempt to discover the reason for their growth mindset.

Question 5 considered the strength of the relationship between participants’ Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ) raw score and their Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI). Findings demonstrate there was little relationship between scores on these two measures with Pearson’s $r$ values ranging from $r = .04$ to $r = .16$. Thus, the results indicate little connection between a participant’s awareness of U.S. poverty and their perception of economic barriers. This may be a further example of the strength of an individual’s perception, rather than awareness, in shaping one’s personal reality or worldview. Rather than comparing total scores per item, it may be interesting in the future to analyze individual participant responses to discover if those with greater poverty awareness have a more accurate perception of the barriers to progress.

Question 6 identified no significant correlation between participants’ MS average total scores and particular items on the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Survey. Pearson’s $r$ values ranged from $r = .01$ to $r = .20$. Those participants with higher mindset scores did not necessarily score higher (or lower) on the PEI. This may suggest that an
individual’s mindset and their perceptions of economic inequality have no significant influence on the other, or that another factor may be useful to study in the future.

However, it would also be valuable to explore the use of these survey items again with a more heterogeneous group of participants to see if the findings yield anything different in comparison to this rather homogeneous group of participants. It may also be interesting to conduct further research to explore the significance of the relationship between participants’ emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and mindset (Dweck, 2010), or to interview educators that are identified as having growth mindset beliefs about intelligence and talent in order to help determine the source of this view.

There was a significant difference between male and female participant scores on four of the 16 MS items and two of the seven PEI items as findings indicate for research Questions 7 and 8. Females’ scores (Question 7: $M = 4.60$, $SD = .86$; Question 8: highest $M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.05$) were significantly higher than male participants’ scores (Question 7: $M = 4.23$, $SD = .65$; Question 8: highest $M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.13$). This indicates that females have less of a fixed mindset than men and have different perceptions of economic inequality and the struggles of various ethnic and socio-economic groups in the U.S. This seems logical since women are more than likely than men to experience lower pay for equal work (McGee Banks, 2007; Sandberg, 2013).

Findings for research Questions 9 and 10 show there was no significant difference in scores measuring the perceptions of economic inequality (PEI) of participants who either live or work in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to the scores of participants who either live or work in an area above the Nebraska MFI ($t$ values ranged from 0.10 to 1.69; all $p$ values were > .05).
This too seems rational because most of the participants consider themselves middle-class and would live in a middle-class area; therefore, there view of the “other” is rather limited by current personal experience and income sorting that often occurs in the selection of housing.

Research Questions 11 and 12 illustrates there was no significant difference of MS scores or PEI scores for participants who work or live in an area where the median family income (MFI) is below the Nebraska MFI compared to those participants who work and live in an area where the MFI income is above the Nebraska MFI. Again, this relates back to Questions 9 and 10 and emphasizes that there is little connection to the view of the middle-class participant to their mindset or perception of economic inequality. Not all participants in this study worked in areas below the Nebraska MFI, and 97% considered themselves middle-class. Many teachers and administrators may work with students that are similar to them in their socio-economic status; therefore, where the participant lived had no relationship to how they viewed traits and intelligence.

As Gary Howard writes,

For me and for most of my White middle-class colleagues, the neighborhood school in the suburbs was a direct reflection of our home environment. For us, every day was a home game. We enjoyed the easy comfort of a smooth transition between home and school, and have assumed that ought to be true for the diverse children we now teach. (2006, p. 120)

Having a diverse group of participants from various socio-economic backgrounds in both teacher and administrator preparation programs would allow for participants to learn
about and from each other regarding important personal experiences that could be valuable in shaping their perceptions, awareness, and understanding.

Discussion

The results of this particular exploratory study within the U.S. indicate that while most participating teachers and administrators, attending a graduate course at a Midwestern public university, recognize the barriers to opportunity that many people face, the majority of participants do not have an awareness of the extent to which poverty affects different people in different ways around the country. Additionally, this may also be an indication of their limited ability to recognize the privileges many of the participants experience due to their own race and class since the majority of participants were also White, currently middle-class, and grew up in a middle-class environment. Paired with questions related to participants’ gender and the socio-economic status of their work, this study confirms similar research results that speak to the importance of personal experience in shaping one’s beliefs, values, and perceptions (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2003; Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). Findings suggest that perhaps participants used what they believed to be true based upon their personal lives and experiences to explain the cause of poverty for others.

This specific research project combined the Poverty Awareness Quiz (PAQ), Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) Survey, and Mindset Survey (MS) in a unique manner. Conducting an item by item factor analysis of each section of the survey instrument (particularly with the PEI and MS) may assist in narrowing the number of questions and help focus the scope of future research on particular areas that would be most beneficial. In the conclusion of this paper, the themes of educational culture, life
experience, and social justice will be considered in how they might influence raising educators’ awareness of poverty, improving their understanding of economic inequality, and growing mindset.

Culture of Education. The standardization of education through the tightening of education policy and federal and state mandates has influenced all aspects of the classroom, as well as, preparation programs and subsequently hiring practices of teachers and administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2012; McGee Banks, 2007; Ravitch, 2013). Directives such as No Child Left Behind and Race to The Top have shifted the focus of education from progress in learning to achievement scores. While accountability is understandable, the increased amount of standardized testing, curricular standards, and national scrutiny have taken their toll on both teachers and students. Simply mandating higher standards and expectations without simultaneously believing that students can reach and exceed these, in addition to providing the support necessary for students to be successful, is a recipe for failure (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Howard, 2006). Students (and their teachers) are astute and can pick up on this “no-win” situation, which may lead to a decline in motivation and engagement only to perpetuate this cycle.

While very little research is available regarding the mindset of teachers, there is extensive research available about the importance of a growth mindset in students and how to foster this belief through positive praise focused on effort, setting appropriate goals, and helping students learn about the malleability of the brain. Perhaps the influx of federal and state mandates is creating a school environment that fosters a fixed mindset in teachers and administrators.
Carol Dweck (2006) reported that 40% of children have either a fixed or a growth mindset and 20% are typically neither fixed nor growth in their beliefs about intelligence and talent. In addition, Dweck’s research documents representative samples of both growth and fixed mindsets in undergraduate college students. This same pattern was not represented in this research sample group comprising graduate students. Has the current culture of educational mandates and structures taken its toll on the beliefs teachers and administrators have of intelligence and traits as evidenced in only two students with a growth mindset? Or is it possible that individuals with a fixed mindset tend to choose education as a career?

There is additional evidence to show that mindset does matter for both the teacher and the learner, and that changing one’s view of the world is a task worth undertaking. Not only does mindset influence a teacher’s perception of him or herself as a learner (which has the potential to impact job performance), but it also has a significant effect on the students in the classroom. Dweck (2006) believes teachers are more effective with students when they believe: 1) in the growth of intelligence and talent through the process of learning, 2) in setting high expectations for students within a nurturing classroom environment, and 3) in providing clear feedback for improvement and helping their students identify how to work hard. Growth mindset teachers love to learn alongside their students. “Fixed mindset teachers often think of themselves as a finished product. Their role is to impart their knowledge” (Dweck, 2006, p. 201). Fostering a growth mindset would be an effective way to improve the lives of adults and their job performance, but more importantly it plays a central role in helping students reach their potential.
In terms of individual differences in personality, people demonstrate unique patterns of development at all stages of life, and these patterns appear to be the result of specific life experiences that pertain to a person’s stage of life. Dweck acknowledges that changing an individual’s mindset is not an easy task; it is a process and practice of “seeing things a new way” (2006, p. 244). This takes time and experience. Dweck recommends that people make mindset a daily practice by comparing and contrasting the differences between the fixed and growth mindset until looking at things through a growth mindset becomes the norm rather than the exception. And, the good news is that there is evidence to support that personality changes can take place at any age. In fact, “people show increased self-confidence, warmth, self-control, and emotional stability with age” (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008, p. 31). These studies support the possibility that external environmental factors may in fact be contributing to a fixed mindset within the field of education.

The importance of personal change is also supported by Dweck’s recent research (2012) regarding prejudice. Her research shows evidence that people with a fixed mindset regarding prejudice are less likely to engage in cross-racial interactions. Perhaps the same argument could be made for interacting with people of different socio-economic classes. Dweck found that a growth mindset could increase the desire for and comfort in cross-race interactions, enhance a person’s willpower, and decrease aggressive tendencies (Dweck, 2012). Dweck believes that the “hallmark of human nature is each person’s great capacity to adapt, to change, and to grow. In fact, perhaps what is built in is this capacity to learn and change according to the world you find yourself in” (Dweck, 2012, p. 614). The way individuals view themselves and others are clearly influenced by their
socio-political identity (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). This might help explain many of
the findings in this research project.

**Life Experiences with Race, Class, and Gender.** Racial identity is a socially,
psychologically, and politically constructed process not a biological trait (Howard, 2006;
Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). To further underline how race matters, White people do
not tend to see themselves as “white.” While others have no choice but to acknowledge
their race on a daily basis, the majority of White people are allowed the choice of
whether or not they acknowledge their race and/or racial identity (Howard, 2006;
McIntosh, 2012). It is not so far to expand Howard’s suggestions about race identity to a
discussion of identity with one’s socio-economic status. In the same way that White
people are privileged in their ability not to have to consider their “whiteness,” perhaps the
middle class is able to have an apathetic understanding of classes outside of their own
socio-economic status.

This discussion is further extended when issues of gender are considered. Studies
(Case, 2007) describe how women are able to understand racial inequality, white
privilege, and racism more readily than their male counterparts due to their personal
experience with gender inequality. This may be a similar to the results of this research
study and the reason behind women’s scores being higher on the perceptions of economic
inequality and growth mindset indicators.

In the past, women and people of color have had fewer job opportunities than
men. Teaching is a career that has been traditionally dominated by women. The historical
context of race, gender, and class continue to be evident today (McGee Banks, 2007).
The number of male elementary teachers is rising, while women and people of color
continue to be under-represented in educational leadership positions. Black superintendents tend to be placed in large urban school districts that have a high proportion of students of color. Many of these districts also have significant and complex financial and educational issues. Meaning, black superintendents are not typically hired in districts that are easier to staff (McGee Banks, 2007).

The power of acknowledging today’s struggle with race, class, and gender is in how it can transform an individual’s beliefs, their personal and professional growth, and their actions. This transformation can bring about personal, political, and social change. When educational leaders begin to understand their personal experiences and the experiences of their students more clearly, they are able to relate and respond more compassionately. These transformational educators often begin to empower their students to share their personal stories. Similar to the goal of cultural proficiency, transformational educators respect and value the unique nature of each individual (Howard, 2006; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003; Yosso, 2005). It is clear that it will take more than acknowledgement and awareness to transform the educational experiences for many youth that are currently disengaged and underachieving (Gorski, 2013; McIntosh, 2012).

It is widely written that to become more culturally conscious, teachers must engage in critical reflection to challenge their thinking and to examine how their influence in the classroom could have both positive and negative influences on their students (Barclay-McLaughlin, Kershaw, & Roberts, 2007; Howard, 2003; Schmidt, 1998, 1999; Yosso, 2005). “Critical reflection should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students’ thinking, learning, and various understandings of the world” (Howard, 2003, p. 197). In fact, studies conducted by
Sanders and Mahalingam (2012) found that when critical reflection and discourse surrounding social class was absent, economically advantaged individuals were limited in their understanding and had difficulty examining their privilege.

In other words, race, sexual orientation, gender, and class continue to have an impact on the experiences of students in the classroom and on all human beings in society and their opportunity to reach their potential. By accepting an “intersectional approach which examines the ways in which race, gender, and other systems of inequality interact and intersect as part of a matrix of privilege and oppression, can we fully comprehend and work to develop successful strategies for combating any and all forms of oppression” (Ferber, 2012, p. 74). There is considerable evidence to show these issues are very relevant to both work place relations and employment practices. Howard (2003), Milner (2010), and Barclay-McLaughlin, et al., (2007) describe the necessity of teachers engaging in honest reflection and critical discourse because of the homogenous cultural make up of the teaching profession and the heterogeneous student population within the K-12 classroom.

To expand upon the work in this study, it would be worthwhile to consider the role that teacher preparation programs, educational leadership programs, and professional development play in informing the perceptions, understandings, and mindset of teachers and administrators. Preparation programs and professional development tied to the work of social justice can be touchy and even contentious, especially when paired with an examination of White privilege (Case, 2007; Ferber, 2012; Howard, 2006; Lindsey, et al., 2003; Yosso, 2005). Understanding the history and importance of cultural proficiency provides useful tools for exploring the intersectional nature of privilege and oppression
with the goal of raising critical consciousness, compassion, and understanding. More importantly, it is important to inspire and empower people toward action in removing barriers so that all people in the U.S. have the opportunity to reach their potential (Yosso, 2005).

One survey and activity from this resource that would be useful to expand upon the work of this research is the “Privilege and Entitlement” survey. This survey asks participants to individually answer questions by lining up across the room according to their response to questions such as, “I can swear, dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my ethnic group” (Lindsey, et al., 2003, p. 279). This method provides a visual “color line” as staff members of diverse demographics arrange themselves according to their responses. Combined with an examination of the Perceptions of Economic Inequality (PEI) survey, the results may reveal how privilege may correlate to lower perceptions of the barriers of opportunity for others.

One of the problems with the use of this tool and others that explore cultural proficiency, privilege, and oppression in higher education is that it can be a challenge to authentically explore socio-political identities if adult students all have similar demographics and backgrounds. This emphasizes the importance of Affirmative Action initiatives, college recruitment programs, and scholarship opportunities expanding to include more students of color within both teacher education and educational leadership departments. The rising cost of college tuition can be a barrier for students from lower-income families. Broadening scholarship opportunities with the acknowledgement that increasing diversity benefits the universities, the profession, students, and the community
is essential. Scholarship awards are often primarily credited as benefiting the individual recipient rather than recognizing the benefit to the institution and to the education of classroom students. This institutional message may contribute to the “deficit view” of the economically challenged families in our communities (Yosso, 2005). Within a heterogeneous learning environment, adults (and classroom students) are allowed to experience the complexities and nuances of learning with and from each other. Strong, trusting relationships must be established in order to engage in deeper dialogue and respect differences in values and beliefs. Forming this trust can be a challenge in a short-term graduate class, however, if students are part of a cohort of learners, this experience may be successful if the relationships are built within the preparation program.

Engaging in the continuous work of internal discovery for the sake of professional and personal improvement can be challenging. But, “to students, teachers are critically important role models because of what they are still learning, not just because of what they already know. It is as experienced learners, with a high interest in and high standards for knowledge and skills, that we communicate the lasting value of these things to students” (Fried, 1995, p. 25). When educators no longer see themselves as learners, they are no longer teaching. “Passionate teachers share their commitment to active learning by showing, not just telling” (Fried, 1995, p. 25).

**Social Justice.** Studies show that Americans demonstrate an overall disconnect between their perceptions about economic inequality and their self-interest when it comes to preferences regarding public policy (Bartels, 2005; Fong, 2001). This suggests “that even given increased awareness of the gap between ideal and actual wealth distributions, Americans may remain unlikely to advocate for policies that would narrow this gap”
(Norton & Ariely, 2011, p. 12). While most conservatives and liberals agree that inequality in the U.S. is a problem, there does not seem to be consensus regarding the cause. Inevitably, this is problematic when reaching a solution.

For example, school funding continues to be inadequate for inner city schools when compared to the suburbs. In fact, “deepening segregation tied to dwindling resources has occurred as African American and Hispanic American students are increasingly concentrated” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 38). Similar trends are also evident in the communities surrounding many urban schools. The inequality present in schools underlines the racial and socio-economic separation of urban and suburban housing. While money is certainly a factor, there is also strong evidence that supports the view that upper-income parents “lobby more effectively for academic programs, computers, libraries, and other supports—and tolerate less neglect” (p. 39). The personal and professional experiences of teachers and administrators experiences shape their beliefs. These beliefs are an influential factor in student academic and personal success (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2006).

One of the many predicaments that personal background causes is that it can blind people to the negative impact that their imagined “goodness and narrow sense of normalcy” have on those who do not share the same demographic and socio-economic advantages. White, middle-class educators often view themselves as engaging in “good work by serving those kids.” These same educators may do this work without connecting to their students’ real personal and emotional experiences (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2006). Gary Howard (2006) categorizes these experiences through themes such as “the luxury of ignorance” and “legacy of privilege” (p. 120). Howard (2006) and others (Case, 2007;
Nieto & Bode, 2012), caution White, middle-class educators from feeling guilty for their social dominance, and instead uses this understanding to bring “further clarity of consciousness regarding the deeper dynamics underlying the achievement gap and the real issues of school reform” (p. 121).

This message serves as a call to action for teachers and administrators to serve as “transformationists.” By acknowledging and working to change the racial and socio-economic inequalities, educators will be able to work with others in society to eliminate (or at the very least reduce) the achievement/opportunity gap. As White, middle-class educators raise their consciousness and understand their efficacy for change they are more able and willing to work for “personal, professional, and institutional growth” rather than pointing blame on students and their families (p. 121). Ironically, Peggy McIntosh (2012) found that it was necessary to show White people that they have power to effect change in order to get them to take action. In her research, McIntosh found that “White people are amazingly ignorant of the amount of social and political power they have, and usually do not use it because they do not recognize it” (p. 196). This is an important implication for teacher and administrator preparation programs and school professional development.

Results of this study and the supporting body of research further emphasize the importance of personal experience in the shaping of an individual’s values, beliefs, and perceptions. As with most U.S. teachers across the country, the participants were mostly from middle-class backgrounds and continued to be middle-class today. The majority of participants in this study were also White. Therefore, they viewed the survey questions from their perceptions similar to the majority of Americans—that of middle-class and
White. This may be a limiting factor that is still evident within most preparatory and educational leadership programs.

This research study has highlighted a significant need in teacher training and professional development. Another important area, and perhaps even more important, are college recruitment and school district hiring practices to include people from diverse economic, gender, and race/ethnic backgrounds. Given the findings of this study and the absence of participants (teachers and administrators) with a growth mindset, it is important to consider what areas of teacher preparation and professional development could influence the mindset of an individual. While no definitive findings, factors, or influences were discovered, the purpose of this exploratory study was achieved. And, like most elements of leadership, there are no easy answers. The most important lesson learned is that when passionate, kind people have the courage to stake a claim on the future, they do make a difference.

Complex and sustainable social, political, institutional, and educational change times time and tremendous patience (D. Kirp, personal communication, November 6, 2014), but the lives of people are affected now. Some argue that teaching for social justice is simply a political agenda, many more believe that ignoring injustice and inequity still evident in society is blatantly immoral. Political or not, this change is needed in schools and communities today. Educational leaders have the efficacy to serve as change agents and opinion leaders now and in the future. This is the source of inspiration and hope for the future that drives the spirits of students and educational leaders forward on this difficult journey of transformation.
References


Appendix A
Survey Instrument

Hello!

This is a voluntary survey. Its purpose is to explore your perceptions and awareness of various issues that affect children and families. If you choose not to participate in the survey, your grade will not be affected in any way. In fact, no UNO faculty member will ever read your individual answer sheet. UNO faculty will only see group answers—no names or student ID numbers will be requested. We will be looking at cross-sectional data in the survey in order to gather information regarding group perceptions and beliefs both before and after LEAD Academy.

Your packets of LEAD information contain two identical survey instruments. The yellow survey is the pre-survey that you will have the option of filling out on the first day of LEAD Academy. The blue survey is the post-survey that you will have the option of completing on the last day of LEAD. Each survey is coded with the same number in order to record a pre to post match; however, this code does not identify you as an individual student.

Surveys may be returned to the large envelope on the instructor workstation at the front of the room. This envelope will be taken directly to the Department of Educational Leadership where graduate assistants will tabulate the data. The survey may take about 15 minutes to complete. Other articles for your review are available on your flash drive or in your folder.

Please feel free to ask any of the UNO staff or faculty from the Department of Educational Leadership if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time and participation!

Dr. Peter Smith, Professor, UNO Department of Educational Leadership

Cindy Copich, UNO Graduate Assistant, Doctoral Candidate
ccopich@unomaha.edu
402-554-3897
Please select only one response by circling what you believe to be the correct answer. Remember, this is NOT graded but please try your best.

1. According to the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF, 2010) how often is a child born into poverty in the U.S.?
   A. Every 32 seconds
   B. Every 3 minutes and 2 seconds
   C. Every 32 minutes

2. According to the Center for American Progress (2007), what proportion of U.S. citizens will live at least 1 year of their lives in poverty?
   A. One-fifth
   B. One-third
   C. One-half

3. Most poor people in the U.S. live:
   A. In inner cities
   B. Outside of inner cities

4. Which sort of areas are seeing the greatest increases in poverty rates (Freeman, 2010)?
   A. Urban areas
   B. Rural areas
   C. Suburban areas

5. One in ten White children in the U.S. is poor according to the CDF (2008). What proportion of Latino children in the U.S. is poor?
   A. One in four
   B. One in six
   C. One in ten

6. According to a study sponsored by the Pew Research Center (Taylor et al., 2011), the median wealth of White households in the U.S. is how many times larger than that of African American households?
   A. Five times larger
   B. Ten times larger
   C. Twenty times larger
7. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH, 2009), what proportion of homeless men in the U.S. are military veterans?
A. Two in ten
B. Four in ten
C. Six in ten

8. According to the wealth analysis group WealthInsight (as referenced by Rushe, 2012), during President Barack Obama’s first term in office, the number of millionaires in the U.S.:
A. Decreased by 6,5000
B. Decreased by 154,000
C. Increased by 49,000
D. Increased by 1,100,00

9. Identify the source of this quote: “We have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifices. Capitalism was built on the exploitation of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor, both black and white, both here and abroad.”
A. bell hooks, author and educator
B. Michael Moore, filmmaker
C. Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights activist
D. Eleanor Roosevelt, human rights advocate

10. In low-poverty U.S. schools, one out of every nine courses is taught by a teacher who is not certified to teach it. In high-poverty schools, the proportion is (Almy & Theokas, 2010):
A. One in nine
B. One in six
C. One in four
Please select only one response for each question.

Thinking of people’s chances of doing well in life, school, or work. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (4)</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>There are generally good opportunities in the U.S. today for people from all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Many people are disadvantaged because of their background and have to work much harder than others of equal talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Many people are severely disadvantaged because of their background, and have to work much harder than others of equal basic talent to overcome the obstacles they face.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Opportunities in the U.S. are not equal today, but there is enough opportunity for just about anyone to reach their potential. It comes down to the individual and how much you are motivated.</td>
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Please complete the sentence with only one of the following options.

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<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Poor (6)</th>
<th>Relatively Poor (5)</th>
<th>Lower-Middle Class (4)</th>
<th>Upper-Middle Class (3)</th>
<th>Upper Class (2)</th>
<th>Wealthy (1)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Growing up my family was</td>
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<td>16. Now, I currently consider myself</td>
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</table>

17. In your opinion, what is the main reason for poverty in the U.S.?

18. In your opinion, what are the most effective policies that can help families in poverty?

Demographic Information.
Please select only one response for each question. Thank you!

1. I primarily identify as:
   ___ male   ___ female   ___ other

2. I identify ethnically as:
   _______________________________________

3. Age:
   ___ 29 or younger
   ___ 30-34
   ___ 35-39
   ___ 40-49
   ___ 50-59
   ___ 60+
4. My current course of study:
   ___ Masters  
   ___ Doctorate  
   ___ Other

5. I am currently employed as a:
   ___ Superintendent  
   ___ Administrator  
   ___ Teacher  
   ___ University Staff  
   ___ Other

6. I work primarily with:
   ___ PreK students  
   ___ K-5 grade students  
   ___ 6-8 grade students  
   ___ High school students  
   ___ Adults  
   ___ Special Education students

7. I currently work in:
   ___ private schools (please provide work zip code: ______________________ )  
   ___ public schools   (please provide work zip code: ______________________ )  
   ___ I do not work in a school.

8. Please provide the zip code of your current home address: ___________________ .

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey! Please return your survey to the envelope at the front of the room by the instructor’s podium.
Your insight is valuable and appreciated. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Dr. Peter Smith  pjsmith@unomaha.edu  
Cindy Copich  ccopich@unomaha.edu