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**AN EXAMINATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AS
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE PEER TRAINERS: A CASE STUDY**

by

David G. Knecht

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
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Dissertation Chair: Cecile H. Sam, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of
Educational Services and Leadership

Committee Members:

Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Educational Services
and Leadership

Hajime Mitani, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Services and
Leadership

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the students and educators who have served and continue to serve as allies, helping to make schools safer, more inclusive, and more comfortable for everyone.

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First, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Cecile H. Sam, for her guidance and support, as well as my committee members, Dr. Ane Turner Johnson and Dr. Hajime Mitani, for agreeing to serve on my committee and for providing invaluable feedback.

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I would also like to thank the 22 participants who volunteered their time and showed great sincerity as they reflected upon their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers. Without their contributions, this study would not exist.

Further, I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their continued encouragement and support.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to Alfred, without whom I would not have been able to endure this journey.

Abstract

David Knecht

AN EXAMINATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AS ANTI-
DEFAMATION LEAGUE PEER TRAINERS: A CASE STUDY

2021-2022

Cecile H. Sam, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine students' experiences as Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Peer Trainers at a predominately White, suburban high school in New Jersey, including in what ways students' experiences reflected transformative learning and empowered them as social justice allies. In addition, the study explored in what ways students' experiences could inform social justice education at their high school. The findings indicate that within this context, many participants experienced at least the beginning of perspective transformation, resulting in a shift from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective and an orientation toward social justice. Further, the findings suggest that adolescence may be an asset when the goal is to teach for transformation, as some participants developed a positive self-image related to their roles, and many felt empowered by their experiences.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In late August of 2020, I recorded a conversation with a group of students who were trained by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to serve as anti-bias trainers in their high school. The dialogue was not part of any research study; rather, the goal was for school staff to hear students' perspectives about how educators should teach about diversity and address topics such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the upcoming presidential election between former President Trump and now President Biden. During the conversation, several students referred to living "in a bubble," implying that they lack exposure to diversity and diverse perspectives. The fact that these ADL Peer Trainers articulated their potential limitations of learning in a predominately White context underscores the importance of implementing educational programs to engage students in conversations and lessons about diversity, equity, and social justice. School leaders who fail to do so miss an opportunity to prepare students for life in a multicultural society (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020). Furthermore, equipping students with knowledge about diverse identities and empowering them as social justice allies may help foster a culture of inclusion by combatting prejudices and biases that negatively affect students who are minoritized or who identify with traditionally marginalized groups.

Well-implemented anti-bias and prejudice reduction programs may improve intergroup relationships (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020) and outcomes for youth (Grapin et al., 2019). While bias includes a positive or negative attitude, stereotype, or action toward an individual or group (Anti-Defamation League, 2019), prejudice stems from bias and refers to negative feelings, beliefs, or behaviors toward another person or group (Grapin et al., 2019). Bias and prejudice are not the same as discrimination, which

involves the “denial of justice, resources, and fair treatment of individuals and groups” (ADL, 2019). However, both biases and prejudices can lead to discrimination against others (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020; Grapin et al., 2019). In fact, biases may be perpetuated at the individual, institutional, and societal level (Adams & Zuniga, 2016) and can lead to inequalities in the workplace, in healthcare, in the criminal justice system, and of course, in schools (Scott, 2020).

Prejudices and biases can have a negative impact on both marginalized individuals and on those with privilege. When prejudices and biases go unchallenged, marginalized individuals can internalize negative attitudes or stereotypes about the group to which they belong or identify, which can adversely affect their self-image and achievement (Adams & Zuniga, 2016; Steele, 1999). Individuals with privilege may hold inaccurate and/or negative beliefs about another person or group, which could result in discriminatory actions (ADL, 2019; Grapin et al., 2019). Furthermore, individuals with privilege may experience “internalized domination” (p. 101), which occurs when they fail to acknowledge the role that socially constructed power dynamics played in shaping their position in society (Adams & Zuniga, 2016).

Although prejudices and biases exist in our nation’s schools, those same institutions represent one avenue through which we can combat bias by educating both students who are marginalized and students with privilege about diversity and social justice. Prejudice reduction and anti-bias programs that raise awareness about privilege and marginalization may serve as one strategy to increase citizens’ sense of agency and commitment to social justice in the United States, ultimately creating a fairer and more equitable society. Noted by the ADL (2019), anti-bias education builds students’

knowledge and skills and can help them identify and combat “bias and discrimination in oneself, others and within institutions” (p. 15). The following case study examined high school students’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School, a pseudonym for a predominately White, suburban high school in New Jersey. In their roles as ADL Peer Trainers, students take a broad approach to create an inclusive school culture by combatting biases and prejudices that can lead to the marginalization and/or oppression of others (ADL, 2019).

Equity and Inclusivity in New Jersey’s Schools

Over the past several decades, elected officials in New Jersey have worked to foster more inclusive, safer schools, with special attention to bullying and protections for traditionally marginalized students. A Report of the New Jersey Commission on Bullying in Schools (2009) called for urgent reform to combat school bullying in which the report’s authors detailed the negative effects of bullying on the social, emotional, and academic well-being of students, especially on those who are marginalized:

Depending on the school composition or school climate, the most vulnerable may include students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT), racial minorities, religious or ethnic minorities, immigrants, those of different socioeconomic backgrounds than the majority in the school, students who are not athletic, students of different weights, shapes and sizes, and students with actual or perceived disabilities (2009, p. 6).

The report’s conclusion that the 2002 New Jersey School Anti-Bullying Law no longer could adequately protect students created a sense of urgency for reform. Recognizing the harmful effects of biases and prejudices on students, especially when students are

targeted for an aspect of their identity, New Jersey legislators passed the NJ Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, warning that “the chronic persistence of school bullying has led to student suicides across the country, including in New Jersey” (p. 1). While the law required schools to “annually establish, implement, document, and assess bullying prevention programs or approaches” (Bill A3466, 2010, p. 11), it gave school districts the autonomy to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of their own programs. In addition to bullying, though, individuals who are marginalized may be subject to less obvious forms of bias such as microaggressions, which the ADL (2019) defined as “everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults” (p 145). Although not as overt as bullying and therefore more difficult to identify and prevent, microaggressions can negatively affect an individual’s or group’s sense of belonging.

While the NJ Anti-bullying Bill of Rights Act (Bill A3466, 2010) added sweeping protections for marginalized groups, other legislation promoted equity by mandating more inclusive curricula. For example, the Amistad Bill (Bill A1301, 2002) led to the formation of the New Jersey Amistad Commission, whose members work to ensure that school districts incorporate the history, experiences, and contributions of African Americans to U.S. history (The Amistad Commission, n.d.). Then, New Jersey legislators adopted a statute which ensures that school districts teach about the contributions of individuals with disabilities and LGBTQ individuals in middle and high school (Bill S1569, 2019). Most recently, New Jersey legislators passed a bill requiring schools to include instruction on diversity and inclusion from kindergarten through grade 12, beginning with the 2021-2022 school year (Bill A4454, 2021). In addition to promoting equity through curriculum, New Jersey’s State Board of Education requires all school

districts to develop Comprehensive Equity Plans (CEP) to “identify and correct all discriminatory and inequitable policies, programs, practices and conditions within or affecting its schools” (New Jersey State Department of Education Division of Field Services, 2019, p. 3). Thus, in addition to closely examining their policies through an equity lens, school districts were called upon to examine the programs and practices that affect the school community’s attitudes toward diversity while proactively confronting biases and prejudices that lead to inequities.

All the steps taken by the New Jersey officials were important ones, for they were designed to decrease bullying, protect marginalized students, and foster more inclusive, equitable schools. However, many of the approaches are top-down, rely on effective implementation by educators, and are “poorly understood” (Grapin et al., 2019, p. 158). Fortunately, educational leaders at the local level may solicit feedback about students’ experiences and implement programs to educate students about diversity and social justice in their own lives, in their schools, in their communities, and in the broader society. At Spruce High School, a predominately White, suburban school in New Jersey, educational leaders implemented the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*. A core element of the program is to combat bias and all forms of prejudice through peer-to-peer training.

Anti-Defamation League

The Anti-Defamation League was established in 1913 to combat anti-Semitism and “to secure justice and fair treatment to all” (ADL, 2019, p. 11). Today, the organization works to eliminate bias and discrimination through its 26 regional offices in the U.S. and around the world (ADL, 2019). Furthermore, the ADL offers many

resources for schools, ranging from comprehensive programs to lessons and resources that parents and schools can utilize to educate others and combat hate (ADL, 2019).

ADL's A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program

ADL's Peer Training Program began in 1991 and trains students across the country to combat bias and prejudice by fostering a culture of inclusion and equity in their schools (ADL, 2019). As the ADL (2019) Peer Training manual indicates, the program empowers students to "take on a leadership role to build understanding, respect and equity among members of a school community" (p. 11) by increasing "understanding of differences and their value to a respectful and civil society" (p. 15). At Spruce High School, every other year two representatives from the ADL facilitate three full-day workshops within a three-week time frame. At the conclusion of the training, participants are prepared to turnkey workshops for other stakeholders in their school and community, including their peers and teachers. As part of the training process, students and staff members who participate are required to examine their own biases before facilitating workshops in which they ask others to do the same. As the ADL Peer Training manual instructs trainees, "Change can only occur when people become aware of their own behaviors and are motivated to change when necessary" (p. 14), adding that trainers first must examine their own biases before helping others challenge bias and bullying (ADL, 2019). In other words, during the workshops, students are asked to critically reflect upon their own backgrounds and the assumptions they have about others while engaging in dialogue and various activities with their peers.

Problem Statement

Raising students' consciousness about biases and prejudices and empowering them as social justice allies is a challenging task, for students bring with them an understanding of the world shaped by adults in their lives and by their environment (Mezirow, 1991; Adams & Zuniga, 2016). No matter the context, but especially in a predominately White school and community, some individuals may embrace ethnocentrism, which Mezirow (2009) described as "the predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior, untrustworthy or otherwise less acceptable" (p. 93). These types of beliefs could result in negative attitudes toward individuals who are different from oneself (Mezirow, 2009). In turn, unequal treatment or negative attitudes toward those who are different may result in implicit or explicit biases, which can manifest as stereotyping, insensitive remarks, fear of difference, microaggressions, and so on (Adams & Zuniga, 2016; ADL, 2019). These can lead to acts of bias such as bullying, ridicule, name-calling, slurs, and belittling jokes (ADL, 2019).

Although every state in the U.S. has adopted anti-bullying policies, programs within individual school districts vary widely (Prince, 2020). In the literature, little is known about students' experiences with prejudice reduction and anti-bias programs. As a result, it is critical to better understand students' experiences within local contexts, which may inform educational program development, implementation, and improvement at the local level. For example, at Spruce High School, prior to this study there were no data about the experiences of students who serve as peer trainers, including how they reflect upon the learning that takes place during the three-day workshops in which they prepare for their roles as peer trainers. Further, little is known about the ways in which students'

experiences foster the type of transformative learning that Mezirow (2009) argued can change “habits of mind” such as ethnocentrism, and that can help individuals rethink assumptions based on “cultural bias” and “stereotyped attitudes and practices,” among other harmful perceptions (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Increasing our understanding of students’ experiences may help inform social justice education at Spruce High School, and it may have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the experiences of students who were trained by the Anti-Defamation League to serve as peer-to-peer anti-bias trainers at Spruce High School. In addition, I examined the ways in which students’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies who believe they can create a more inclusive and equitable school, community, and society. Finally, I explored in what ways participants’ experiences could inform social justice education at Spruce High School. I chose a particularistic case study framework to examine the experiences of ADL peer trainers within a predominately White, suburban high school in New Jersey (Merriam, 1998). The unit of analysis was a group of ADL Peer Trainers who I selected through criterion sampling and who were part of the 2019 and 2021 cohort of ADL Peer Trainers in their high school. Data collection methods included focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and field notes taken during observations of the workshops in which participants were trained by the ADL as Peer Trainers.

Research Questions

This case study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?
2. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies?
3. In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?

Definition of Key Terms

For clarity, I have defined several terms that were used throughout the study.

ADL Peer Trainer. Used to describe students at Spruce High School who were trained by the ADL as anti-bias trainers.

Bias. Defined by the ADL (2019) as “an inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgement” (p. 299).

Diversity. Contrasted with social justice by Bell (2016), diversity refers to “differences among social groups such as ethnic heritage, class, age, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and nationality” (p. 1).

Empower. Borrowed from Russell et al.'s (2009) study on how youth are empowered through Gay-Straight Alliances, empowerment for the current study includes three dimensions: “Having and using knowledge” (p. 896); personal empowerment including “feeling good about oneself, having a voice, and having control or agency” (p. 897); and relationship empowerment as members of a group with a common goal to effect change in others.

Equity. Different from equality, which prioritizes fairness, equity involves individuals getting what they need, which implies that some individuals lack access and resources that are given to others (ADL, 2019).

Prejudice. Resulting from bias, prejudice occurs when an individual or group is characterized based on stereotypes (ADL, 2019).

Social Justice. Both a goal and a process to create an equitable and inclusive society (ADL, 2019; Bell, 2016).

Social Justice Ally. Drawing upon the ADL’s (2019) definition for both social justice and allies, a social justice ally “speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying” (p. 229). At Spruce High School, this type of person is often referred to locally as an Upstander.

Conceptual Framework

Social Justice Education

In “Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education,” Bell (2016) described social justice as both a goal and a process. The goal of social justice education is for “full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (Bell, 2016, p. 1). Social justice focuses on raising awareness about inequality to dismantle the systems and practices that privilege some while creating disadvantages for others (Adams & Zuniga, 2016). The process to achieve social justice is ongoing, and it should value diversity and engage individuals and groups in collaboration for change (Bell, 2016). Furthermore, it should reflect the notion that individuals have or can develop the capacity to effect change (Bell, 2016). Finally, Bell (2016) described the vision of social justice as a society in which all individuals are

“physically and psychologically safe and secure, recognized and treated with respect” (p. 1). How, then, can educational leaders leverage Bell’s vision for social justice in our nation’s schools?

Perhaps increasing awareness and understanding of biases and social justice can enlighten all individuals living and learning in the United States, not through shame or guilt, but by empowering them to critically examine their own beliefs and embrace their capacity to effect change in their school, community, and society. Perhaps empowering adolescents as social justice allies in our nation’s schools can help fulfill the promise of a safe, secure, equitable future for every individual.

Education as Empowerment

The concept of using education to empower individuals to challenge injustice is not a new one, for Paulo Freire (1970) defined the term *conscientization* to describe the state at which an individual arrives at a “deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it” (p. 27). Habermas (1971) described a similar state in which individuals develop “emancipatory knowledge” by critically examining their assumptions about themselves and others. By reflecting upon the ways in which they are victims of and contributors to oppression, individuals can take steps to effect change in their own lives, in their schools, and in their communities. Cranton and Hoggan (2012) noted that “When people become aware of their oppression and individually and collectively challenge the social oppression, this is emancipatory learning” (p. 521). Although Cranton and Hoggan (2012) referred to the emancipation of individuals who are oppressed, the concept can be extended to individuals who are not from traditionally oppressed groups but who become

more aware of the beliefs that they take for granted. The increase in awareness allows individuals to examine problematic beliefs and open them to change (Cranton, 2006). For example, an individual who grew up believing that the parents of a socioeconomically disadvantaged family did not work as hard as the parents of a middle-class family may identify flaws in their assumption and realize that other forces such as privilege may have played a role in the latter's success. Thus, at the local level, school districts that promote the type of *conscientization* described by Freire (1970) and the emancipatory learning described by Habermas (1971) may help students develop the agency and commitment to examine their own beliefs and open those beliefs to revision. Perhaps such an approach will help to combat the implicit and overt biases and prejudices that contribute to social inequities while also creating citizens who are oriented toward social justice.

Transformative Learning Theory

Westheimer and Kahne (2003) described the justice-oriented citizen as one who “critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes; seeks out and addresses areas of injustice, and knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change” (p. 52). However, as part of the journey toward a social justice orientation, individuals first must examine their own beliefs. The multi-stage process through which individuals become aware of inequities and ultimately become agents of change can be explained by Mezirow's (2009) transformative learning theory, which involves critically reflecting upon one's assumptions and engaging in dialogue to learn from others.

Mezirow (1991) explained that individuals' interpretations of reality are subject to change as they encounter new contexts, new experiences, or new knowledge. In fact, a

transformation is typically initiated by what Mezirow (1991) described as a “disorienting dilemma,” which can result from “an eye-opening discussion, book, poem, or painting or from efforts to understand a different culture with customs that contradict our own previously accepted presuppositions” (p. 168). Thus, a program such as the Anti-Defamation League’s *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program* has the potential to serve as the catalyst for transformation of students’ perspectives. As students reflect upon their identities, experiences, and biases while engaging in dialogue with others about diversity and social justice, they may experience transformative learning, which Mezirow (2003) defined as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p. 58). Instead of accepting reality as defined by others, such as the media, peer groups, or other individuals in one’s life, an individual who experiences transformative learning develops their own conclusions (Mezirow, 1991). As Mezirow (1991) noted, “Reflective learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid” (p. 6). Thus, in this case individuals may realize that their assumptions about other cultures or individuals are based on stereotypes, that their perceptions of white privilege are incomplete, or that they have misconceptions about individuals with disabilities, for example.

In this case study, I applied Cranton’s (2002) conceptualization of Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning theory to students’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, examining how individuals reflect upon beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions to develop

new understandings. Mezirow's concept of critical reflection can help individuals "become aware of oppressive structures and practices, developing tactical awareness of how they might change these, and building the confidence and ability to work for collective change" (Brown, 2004, p. 85). Typically applied to adults, transformative learning theory may hold the key to creating schools in which students are more socially conscious, ones in which students play a vital role in decreasing bullying, advocating for equity, and standing up for those who are marginalized.

Worldview

I approached this research from a constructivist worldview, which maintains that individuals construct meaning by reflecting on their experiences (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2014). The constructivist worldview aligns with Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, which posits that "meaning is interpretation, and since information, ideas, and contexts change, our present interpretations of reality are always subject to revision and replacement" (p. xiv). It is this framework that informed the choice of methods and how I approached data analysis, as I discussed in Chapter 3. As a result, I used qualitative research methods, which assume that individuals construct their own realities as they interact with their environment (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers seek to understand how individuals "make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). In this case, I examined the self-described experiences of ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School.

Implications for Leadership

I approached the study as an educational leader who seeks to become transformative. Brown (2004) argued that educational leaders should prioritize social

justice, from leader preparation programs to practice, by engaging in critical reflection. According to Brown (2004), the role of critical reflection is to increase educational leaders' awareness of equity and social justice, beginning to see themselves as agents of change. Theoharis (2007) added that educational leaders engage in social justice leadership when they "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision" (p. 223). In our diverse society, it is not sufficient for educational leaders to focus solely on increasing students' academic achievement; transformative leadership requires equal attention to social transformation (Shields, 2011). Better understanding students' experiences and advocating for programs designed to empower students with the knowledge and skills to reduce marginalization may help educational leaders transform schools into more equitable institutions.

Research Scope

Given the choice to conduct a case study, in Chapter 3 I described the context in detail so that readers could determine to what extent the findings are applicable to their own contexts. However, it should be noted that generalizability of findings was not a goal of this study. After all, the case study was bound by the context in which the research occurred (Merriam, 1998). First, the study was bound by the school's partnership with the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*, including the nuances of how the program was implemented at Spruce High School. Second, the study was bound by the context in which the program was implemented, in a predominantly White, suburban high school in New Jersey. Finally, the study was bound by the participants themselves, each drawing upon their past to make meaning of their experiences as ADL

Peer Trainers. Nevertheless, the findings have the potential to influence practice at Spruce High School and potentially other contexts as determined by readers.

Significance

Increasing educators' understanding of students' experiences with anti-bias and prejudice reduction programs is especially important given recent national backlash and fear over Critical Race Theory (Sawchuk, 2021). In fact, in 2021 many states passed laws banning the teaching of Critical Race Theory in K-12 schools, as some individuals argue that the theory is anti-White and divisive (Sawchuk, 2021). Furthermore, some opponents of Critical Race Theory inaccurately apply the concept broadly, using it to oppose all programs designed to create more equitable and inclusive schools (New Jersey School Boards Association, 2021). It is important to note that the ADL Peer Training program is not based upon Critical Race Theory; rather, the program empowers students to play a role in fostering inclusive schools in which all individuals feel a sense of belonging. Examining students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, including in what ways their roles empower them as social justice allies, may improve understanding of the program and alleviate some of the misconceptions and fears about Critical Race Theory.

As the current case study was bound by the context in which the research occurred (Merriam, 1998), its most significant contribution is to policy, practice, and future research specific to Spruce High School. However, the study could contribute to broader conversations about policy, practice, and research related to transformative learning, equity, and social justice education in our diverse society.

Policy

While federal, state, and local policymakers have taken many important steps to promote diversity, prevent bullying, and create more inclusive, equitable schools, improving our understanding of students' transformative learning experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, as well as the ways in which they are empowered as social justice allies who believe they can make a difference in their school, community, and society, can help policymakers make decisions about future programs and social justice education. At Spruce High School, collecting and analyzing data about students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers can provide useful insight for policymakers as they consider students' perspectives when deciding how to create schools in which all students feel safe, valued, and a sense of belonging.

Practice

Next, the findings have the potential to influence practice at Spruce High School. Acquiring and analyzing data about students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers will help to inform the next steps for anti-bias training and social justice education. For example, have participants developed a commitment to social justice education? If so, how can educators leverage participants' commitment to promote equity? If not, how can educators instill and strengthen participants' commitment to social justice? In addition, the data can help educational leaders in the local context understand in what ways students' experiences with the ADL Peer Training program reflect transformative learning, providing useful insight about students' journeys and their current orientations toward diversity and social justice.

Research

Finally, the study adds to the growing body of research on transformative learning theory but represents one of the few studies that applies the concept to adolescents. This study also contributes to the conversation about whether adolescents can experience transformative learning, and the application of transformative learning to adolescents may contribute to knowledge about adolescent learning more generally. Moreover, the study uniquely applies transformative learning theory to the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*.

Organization

The remainder of the dissertation follows a traditional format. In Chapter 2, I situated the case study in the context of literature, including studies related to the ADL Peer Training Program and transformative learning theory. In Chapter 3, I explained the worldview that informed the methodological choices and described the sampling methods, data collection choices, and plan for analysis. In Chapter 4, I detailed the findings. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discussed conclusions and implications for policy, leadership and practice, and future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine in what ways students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers in a predominately White, suburban high school reflect transformative learning, to explore in what ways students' experiences as anti-bias trainers empower them as social justice allies, and to examine in what ways their experiences could inform social justice education in their high school. In this literature review, I first established a context for programs designed to increase respect for diversity and decrease prejudice, discussing the connection between the concepts of "othering" and bullying individuals who have been traditionally marginalized because of different identities. Next, I explored anti-prejudice interventions and argued that an approach specific to local needs is perhaps most effective and impactful. Then, I discussed social justice education and introduced a previous study that focused specifically on the Anti-Defamation League's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*. Finally, I examined the varied literature on transformative learning theory, noting the latter's applicability to both adolescents and social justice education while showing a need for the current study.

Creating Inclusive Schools

As the United States becomes increasingly diverse (Frey, 2019), it is critical for schools to educate students about diversity and social justice to create a more inclusive, equitable society. Although data on the effectiveness of diversity training is mixed (Bezrukova et al., 2016), social justice education has the potential to promote understanding and equity by "help[ing] participants develop awareness, knowledge, and

processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society” (Bell, 2016, p. 4). As I established in Chapter 1, neglecting to teach students about social justice may perpetuate existing hierarchies in which some individuals are privileged while others are disadvantaged because of their race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic. Similarly, failure to instill a respect for diversity can result in “harmful behaviors like name-calling, bullying, social exclusion and discrimination” (ADL, 2019, p. 15). This concept is not a new one.

Takaki (2008) argued that different individuals have faced oppression throughout United States history. In *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, Takaki (2008) wrote that “not to be ‘white’ is to be designated as the ‘Other,’—different, inferior, unassimilable” (p. 4). Although Takaki referred to race and ethnicity, the same is true for other differences. Negative perceptions of individuals designated as the “other” also have infiltrated schools, contributing to biased attitudes that can lead to discrimination and bullying and, in many cases, achievement gaps (Dantley & Tillman, 2010) that may adversely affect individuals’ long-term success. In fact, Beelman and Lutterbach (2020) noted that “prejudice and discrimination against social out-group members are ubiquitous phenomena in society” (p. 309). Similarly, McKown (2005) added that “the persistence of racial prejudice” (p. 178) indicates that many prejudice-reduction efforts have failed to achieve their goals of a more equitable society. As a result, educational leaders face an uphill battle not just to prevent bullying, but to implement programs that teach students to value diversity and to challenge stereotypes that could marginalize some of their peers. After all, the perceptions we have of

individuals who are different from ourselves are often inaccurate and based on stereotypes (Tatum, 1997). These attitudes can lead to behaviors that further marginalize individuals in our schools.

When students are marginalized, they may lack a sense of belonging, which Cobb and Krownapple (2019) defined as “the extent to which people feel appreciated, validated, accepted, and treated fairly within an environment” (p. 43). Contrasting four diverse environments (excluded, segregated, integrated, and included), Cobb and Krownapple (2019) argued that an inclusive environment, one in which traditionally marginalized individuals experience high access and unconditional belonging, establishes a foundation for equity. Only after individuals feel a sense of belonging can they focus on achievement (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). Thus, creating more inclusive school environments may improve student achievement more generally and help reduce achievement gaps.

In New Jersey, state legislators took steps to protect individuals who face marginalization. The state’s Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, which requires school districts to implement and assess anti-bullying programs, defined harassment, intimidation, and bullying as an incident motivated by characteristics such as “race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical, or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic” (Bill A3466, 2010, p. 7). As a result, many school districts in the state implemented proactive strategies to teach students to celebrate diversity and combat bias against individuals from non-dominant groups. In fact, prejudice is one of many factors that is connected to bullying in schools (Dessel, 2010). Educational leaders who seek to

implement programs that foster inclusive schools may benefit from examining different types of interventions and how they work to change students and society. Better understanding the origins of biases and prejudices, as well as types of anti-prejudice interventions, can help educational leaders make informed decisions about what types of programs may work best in their contexts.

Origins of Biases and Prejudices

One explanation characterizes the development of prejudices as a social cognitive process resulting from the human tendency to categorize individuals into groups (Perszyk et al., 2019). Another explanation, contact theory, posits that segregation and a lack of intergroup contact and interdependency contributes to biases and prejudicial attitudes toward different others (McKown, 2005). Without experiences that challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about others, in-group biases against out-groups are reinforced (Hjerm et al., 2018). Drawing upon theories that connect social context to prejudice development, such as social learning theory and intergroup contact theory, Hjerm et al. (2018) concluded that adolescents' prejudice is related to social influence. Indeed, youth develop biases and prejudices from their environments, including adults in their lives, peers, and consumption of media (Adams & Zuniga, 2016; McKown, 2005; Mezirow, 1991). Many anti-prejudice interventions are designed to combat biases and prejudices by facilitating contact between groups, increasing knowledge about different others, and strengthening individuals' skills.

Types of Anti-Prejudice Interventions

Beelmann and Lutterbach (2020) distinguished between three types of anti-prejudice interventions designed to promote intergroup harmony, including contact

interventions, knowledge-based interventions, and individual skill promotion. According to their meta-analysis, contact interventions and skill development were most effective (Beelman & Lutterbach, 2020). Although Beelmann and Lutterbach (2020) focused on ethnic, racial, and national prejudice, their classification of interventions to reduce prejudice can apply to discrimination against other identities as well.

Contact Interventions

The first type of interventions, contact ones, usually occur in schools with a diverse student population. Perhaps the best-known theory of contact interventions is Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which posits that contact between individuals can reduce prejudice and discrimination and improve intergroup relationships so long as certain conditions are satisfied (Allport, 1954; Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020). Although interventions based on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, including ones that ask participants to imagine the contact with different others, show significant positive effects on reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020), contact-based programs may not be the best match for predominately White, suburban schools that must rely on imagined contact over face-to-face interactions.

Knowledge-Based Interventions

Knowledge-based interventions involve teaching about "social outgroups" and "imparting positive intergroup norms and values associated with democracy, cultural diversity, tolerance, and human rights" (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020, p. 314). As examples of knowledge-based interventions, Beelmann and Lutterbach (2020) cited an anti-bias curriculum developed by the Anti-Defamation League's *A World of Difference Institute*, as well as diversity trainings in general, anti-racism trainings, and implicit bias

trainings. Evidence on the effectiveness of knowledge-based interventions is mixed. Stephan et al.'s (2004) analysis of 35 studies of anti-bias trainings found small to medium effects on both attitudes and behaviors. Bezrukova et al.'s (2016) analysis of 260 studies of diversity trainings concluded that these types of training can help reduce prejudice and discrimination, but Lai et al.'s (2014) analysis of 17 implicit bias training interventions showed less promising results.

Skill-Based Interventions

Finally, skill-based interventions, or what Bezrukova et al. (2016) called behavioral learning, build individual capacities. While Beelmann and Lutterbach (2020) described these interventions as ones that focus on “perspective taking, empathy, conflict resolution, or social competencies in general,” I expand their definition to include ally behavior, which includes having the skills to intervene to stop bullying or redirect comments that reflect biases or stereotypes (ADL, 2019). The authors concluded that “individual training in perspective-taking, empathy, and social skills seems to offer one of the best ways of reducing prejudice and discrimination—at least in childhood and adolescence” (Beelman & Lutterbach, 2020, p. 318). In fact, Beelmann’s & Heinemann’s (2014) meta-analysis of 81 studies, 45 of which focused on skill-based interventions, concluded that skill-based programs showed “high potentials” (p. 18) for promoting intergroup harmony.

From Learner to Social Justice Ally

While contact and knowledge-based interventions are important for individual growth, skill-based interventions may empower learners as social justice allies. A knowledge-based intervention such as teaching students about diversity, while important

for building cultural competence and knowledge about different identities, will not necessarily promote equity or empower students as social justice allies who feel they can make a difference in their school, community, and society. Prieto (2009) distinguished between teaching students about diversity and teaching them about privilege, advocating for the latter no matter how challenging and uncomfortable it may be. While diversity training may teach *about* different others, it does not necessarily teach about privilege and oppression and therefore may not advance the cause of social justice. Prieto's (2009) attention to privilege reflects social justice education, which aims to confront social structures that privilege some groups over others (Bell, 2016). Similarly, Cobb and Krownapple (2019) argued that the goal of social equality should not be diversity, for "diversity does not ensure belonging" (p. 28). Instead, they asserted that schools should focus on inclusion, or "engagement within a community where the equal worth and inherent dignity of each person is honored" (p. 33). To create such a culture of belonging, school leaders should enlist students as partners in the creation of an inclusive school environment. After all, students are the stakeholders who represent the largest percentage of a school's population within the building. Levin (2000) added that students' voices are often left out of educational reform, resulting in a missed opportunity to empower students and learn from their experiences.

Prieto (2009) called upon educators to help students play an integral role in reducing bias: "Students must eradicate their personal biases and counteract their societal privileges before they can begin to truly appreciate and respect different cultures" (p. 37). Similarly, Kumashiro's (2000) framework called upon schools to create social equality, including "education of the other," "education about the other," "education that is critical

of privileging and othering,” and “education that changes students and society” (p. 25). Indeed, proactive measures to teach students about diverse identities and social justice may promote understanding of differences and reduce inequities but only to the extent that students experience a change, whether in the form of acknowledging and trying to eliminate their own biases or adopting a social justice orientation.

ADL Peer Training Program

One promising program that may help students adopt an orientation toward social justice through a combination of knowledge and skill-based interventions is the Anti-Defamation League’s *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*, which trains students to identify bias, embrace and celebrate diversity, strengthen intergroup relations, and combat racism and anti-Semitism (ADL, 2020). The program’s premise is that “anti-bias education can and should be spread through the most powerful agents of change in a high school—the students themselves” (ADL, 2006, p. 1). As trainees, Peer Trainers participate in a three-day workshop in which they develop the capacities to facilitate critical conversations, which Hipolito-Delgado and Zion (2017) describe as “those that broach difficult topics (like racism, oppression, and social inequities) and that might be challenging and frightening to participants” (p. 704). Addressing these topics are at the very core of social justice education.

In the only found analysis of the ADL Peer Training program, researchers described a field experiment of 539 students from ten high schools, 144 of whom were peer trainers (Paluck, 2010; ADL, 2006). Of the 10 participating schools, five were randomly selected as treatment schools, while the other five served as the control group (Paluck, 2010). Participants were given a pretest questionnaire and a follow-up phone

survey, and they did not know the survey was connected to the Peer Training program (Paluck, 2010). Compared to their peers in schools without the program, ADL Peer Trainers were “significantly more likely” (ADL, 2006, p. 3) to acknowledge structural discrimination, indicating that the program may foster an awareness of social inequities. Compared to students in the control group, Peer Trainers also were more aware of bias in their schools and articulated a more in-depth rationale for why students should intervene when peers are victims of prejudice (ADL, 2006). Although participants in both treatment and control groups thought that students should intervene to stop teasing, ADL Peer Trainers “demonstrated a greater understanding of the negative impact of teasing on the target, a recognition that teasing is one possible manifestation of prejudice, and an appreciation for the power of peers for preventing such actions” (ADL, 2006, p. 4). Finally, Peer Trainers were more comfortable talking about social bias than their peers in the control group (ADL, 2006). The study further concluded that the peers of those who were trained to serve as Peer Trainers were more likely to identify Peer Trainers as students who confront prejudice compared to peers of the students in the control group (Paluck, 2010). However, when asked to add their names to a petition supporting gay rights, the number of Peer Trainers who agreed to do so compared to participants in the control group was not statistically significant (Paluck, 2010). Thus, while the ADL Peer Training program increased participants’ awareness of bias and the need to intervene, their comfort level discussing social bias, and their visibility as allies, there is no evidence of statistically significant behavioral changes specific to the gay rights petition. Although Paluck’s (2010) report showed some degree of growth in Peer Trainers, it did not discuss students’ experiences in detail.

Conceptual Framework

Empowering Students as Social Justice Allies

Examining students' subjective experiences as ADL Peer Trainers through the lens of social justice education (Bell, 2016) may provide insight about the ways in which their experiences empower them as social justice allies. After all, Bell (2016) noted that social justice education "aims to connect analysis to action; to help participants develop a sense of agency and commitment, as well as skills and tools, for working with others to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities of which they are a part" (p. 4). Bell's (2016) characterization of social justice education, with its emphasis on agency, skill-building, and action, complements Russel et al.'s (2009) definition of youth empowerment.

Russell et al. (2009) addressed a gap in the literature by examining and defining empowerment as it applied to youth. Analyzing data from focus groups, the authors categorized three dimensions of empowerment as described by students who were part of Gay-Straight Alliances, including the acquisition and application of knowledge, feelings of self-efficacy to effect change, and feelings of solidarity as part of a group that can empower others (Russell et al., 2009). Given that the authors used students' perspectives to define youth empowerment, this study also defined empowerment through the three dimensions described by Russell et al. (2009).

As individuals become aware of inequities in society and acquire the knowledge, skills, and agency to challenge the status quo, they become empowered (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012; Freire, 1970; Habermas, 1971). Thus, at the intersection of social justice education, youth empowerment, and transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2006;

Mezirow, 2003; Mezirow, 2009), which I discussed in the next section, students may engage in the type of reflection required to become justice-oriented citizens who help to foster more inclusive schools and a more equitable society (Harrell-Levy et al., 2016).

Transformative Learning Theory

One way to understand social justice education and diversity initiatives is to examine students' experiences within a specific context related to Prieto's (2009) assertion that individuals first must come to terms with their personal biases to acknowledge their own privileges. Only then can they embrace a social justice orientation and join as allies in the fight against inequality. Thus, increasing our understanding of how individuals examine their own biases and become more conscious of the role of privilege in society may inform social justice education. Furthermore, understanding whether and how individuals decide to become social justice allies may help promote understanding and reduce biases that lead to inequities not just in schools but across societal institutions. Noted by Harrell-Levy et al. (2016), "When [social justice education is] combined with a transformative learning approach, students engage in critical reflection on issues pertinent to society like global citizenship, stewardship, racism, sexism, poverty, and crime" (p. 74).

Mezirow (1979) developed transformative learning theory after studying adult women who decided to continue their education later in life. Put simply, a learning theory can be used to explain the process of learning, and transformative learning theory involves individuals critically examining their assumptions, opening their current beliefs, feelings, or attitudes to new information, and altering their original perspective dramatically enough to spark a change in behavior (Mezirow, 1996). However, this study

broadens the notion of behavior change to include changes in thoughts as well (Cranton, 2002). Transformative learning occurs when individuals become aware of how their current assumptions are limited by their past experiences, and they experience a change in perspective (Mezirow, 1996).

Mezirow (1978) described ten stages of perspective transformation and reaffirmed them decades later (Mezirow, 2009, p. 94). As outlined by Mezirow (1978; 2009), the process begins with a single experience or series of experiences after which an individual questions or doubts a current attitude or belief, and it may end when the individual has completed a perspective transformation.

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

However, it is important to note that most scholars no longer consider transformative learning stages to be steps but instead view the process as more fluid (Cranton, 2002).

Transformative Learning and Metacognition. Implicit in the transformative learning process is the important role of metacognition. Metacognition occurs before, during, and or after a “cognitive event” (Winne & Azevedo, 2014) as individuals engage in self-reflection to examine their current belief systems, the origin of their beliefs, and how new ideas conflict with past ones. Cranton (2002) noted that critical reflection “is the means by which we work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge, considering their sources, and examining underlying premises” (p. 65). King (2009) summarized the metacognitive process that may result in transformative learning:

As adults consider and learn new information, they determine how to make it fit into their existing belief and value structures. If the information readily fits into past patterns, they continue with an understanding of the information, but without much further disruption in their beliefs, values, and assumptions. However, if the information does not readily fit, they may begin to question their values, beliefs, and assumptions to determine what is out of place (p. 7).

King (2009) added that an individual can experience a disorienting dilemma after experiencing new educational content or a major life event, leaving open a wide range of possibilities for types of triggers that can activate the process of transformative learning. For example, the process could result from an individual’s encounter with a new book, a workshop, or even the loss of a job. King (2009) added that a disorienting dilemma “throws the learner off balance from their usual perspective and view” (p. 5), using words such as “upheaval” (p. 5) and “turbulence” (p. 6) to describe the onset.

However, other scholars have characterized a disorienting dilemma as a less jolting experience. Like King, Cranton (2002) added that the transformative learning process can be initiated by a major life event or by an ordinary experience such as an unexpected question, but Cranton qualified that it can begin with a single epiphany or more incrementally. For the latter, the individual may not know their perspective is changing until after it happens (Cranton, 2002). Nohl (2015) affirmed that the process “may begin unnoticed, incidentally, and sometimes even casually” (p. 45). Given the potential for a gradual process, Cranton’s (2002) and Nohl’s (2015) characterizations seem less disorienting and more enlightening.

Over the last several decades, many scholars have attempted to clarify, alter, or build upon Mezirow’s ten-stage theory. Cranton (2002), for example, reduced Mezirow’s ten stages to seven facets of transformative learning, which are used in this study. Her description includes an initial “activating event” (p. 66), followed by recognizing assumptions, questioning the origin and effects of assumptions, becoming open to alternative perspectives, engaging in discourse to examine alternative viewpoints, revising assumptions, and finally, “acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives” (p. 66). Cranton (2002) advocated for turning her seven facets into specific teaching strategies that can be used to facilitate transformation. However, while she acknowledged that transformation cannot be guaranteed, there is always the possibility that a student will have a transformative experience if teachers create the conditions for transformation to occur.

Perspective Transformation. Transformative learning scholars agree that perspective transformation is an outcome of transformative learning (Cranton, 2002;

King, 2009; Mezirow, 2009). To determine whether an individual has experienced perspective transformation, researchers may interview or survey participants to find evidence. To better illustrate the concept, King (2009, p. 4) provided examples of what individuals may say if they have experienced perspective transformation:

“I see things really differently now.”

“I am much more open-minded to views other than mine.”

“I never understood what my career really meant.”

“I have had such a radical change in my view of issues.”

“I have more self-confidence than I ever dreamed possible.”

Each example contrasts a before- and after-transformation as individuals explain that they see the world differently, are more open-minded, attributed meaning to their career, adopted different views, and developed self-confidence. King (2009) added that transformative learning occurs as adults “begin to and ultimately transition to a significantly new place in their understanding of values, beliefs, assumptions, themselves and their world” (p. 4). Applied to social justice, individuals may question their past misconceptions about traditionally marginalized individuals and perhaps adopt a more inclusive attitude, or for the first time in their lives they may become aware of the role of privilege and oppression in our society.

Transformative Learning Theory and an Inclusive Society. While transformative learning theory has been applied to many contexts, Mezirow (2009) explicitly noted that it can play a role in fostering a more inclusive society, one in which citizens embrace diversity and challenge implicit biases. Mezirow (2009) explained the theory’s focus on “creating the foundation in insight and understanding essential for

learning how to take effective social action in a democracy” (p. 96). In other words, transformative learning can help individuals rethink assumptions based on “cultural bias” and “stereotyped attitudes and practices” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59), among other beliefs. For example, the theory can help individuals engage in critical self-reflection and abandon a belief in ethnocentrism, which Mezirow (2009) described as “the predisposition to regard others outside one’s own group as inferior, untrustworthy, or otherwise less acceptable” (p. 93). Perhaps transformative learning theory, then, can provide insight about how individuals abandon inaccurate stereotypes that lead to othering (Takaki, 2008; Tatum, 1997) in favor of personal ethics that embrace different identities and help usher in a culture of belonging (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019).

As individuals encounter new information, or as they learn through an effective anti-bias or social justice education program, they may experience a “disorienting dilemma” followed by “a critical assessment of assumptions” (Mezirow, 2009, p. 94). Then, as individuals experience Cranton’s (2002) seven facets of transformative learning, they may act upon their new knowledge and become social justice allies. At the intersection of transformative learning theory and social justice education, students may develop “a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, the environment, and the broader world in which we live” (Bell, 2016, p. 1). Some researchers have applied transformative learning theory to examine whether specific education programs can change students’ perspectives and spark action toward social justice.

For example, Robinson and Levac (2018) examined first-year college students’ experiences in a civic engagement and global citizenship course. After studying 24

undergraduates by collecting data through pretests, posttests, students' course work, and focus groups, the authors found evidence of transformative learning experiences related to privilege and oppression in some students, but the depth and breadth of students' critical reflection varied. As the authors acknowledged, participants had chosen to sign up for a course called "Engaged Global Citizenship" (p. 123). As a result, the findings could reflect bias in that the participants already had some level of interest and engagement as global citizens. Nevertheless, the authors found no evidence that students' transformative experiences resulted in action or an orientation toward social justice.

Shifting Habits of Mind Versus Shifting Toward Action. Robinson and Levac (2018) framed their findings through an examination of students' philosophical, psychological, epistemological, and moral-ethical habits of mind, or the ways that students have been conditioned to think. Philosophical habits of mind included the development of an orientation toward social justice. Psychological habits of mind included participants' perceptions of themselves as global citizens who are self-reflective and believe that they can make a difference as individuals. Next, epistemic habits of mind included what participants identified as sources of knowledge, such as interactions with individuals who are different from themselves. Finally, moral-ethical habits of mind included participants' sense of what is right and wrong. Although there was evidence of students shifting their habits of mind in all four categories, the authors found no evidence that students began shifting toward action, which reflects the latter stages of transformative learning. The authors concluded by raising an important question: Can transformative learning take place without action?

One of the challenges of answering Robinson's and Levac's (2018) question involves competing notions of what is meant by action. For transformative learning related to social justice to take place, is it enough for individuals to think differently, or do they need to engage in social justice activism? And how can one determine whether transformative learning took place when action steps are embedded in the learning experience, such as with students who participate in anti-bias training to turnkey workshops for their peers? In other words, are students engaging in action because it is an expectation of their participation as peer trainers, or did a personal transformation serve as an impetus for action?

Cranton's (2002) conceptualization of Mezirow's latter stages leaves open a wide range of possibilities for action, as her final phase involves "acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives" (p. 66). Likewise, Cranton and Hoggan (2012) broadly characterized what would be considered action: "If someone who previously showed little tolerance for diversity, for example, now demonstrates inclusive behaviors, it could be concluded that a shift in perspective has occurred for that person" (p. 522). Similarly, King (2009) seemed to suggest that action is necessary, for she referred to the transformative learning process as "a time of reflection, change, and action" (p. 6). However, as an example of transformative learning evidence, King (2009) described changed beliefs without explicitly noting changed behaviors: "If my ideas or beliefs were never questioned or discussed with other classmates or my teacher, then I would have never changed or thought about changing my views or beliefs" (p. 7). While King provided an example of

changed beliefs as evidence of transformative learning, she did not include evidence of the individual acting upon the new perspective.

Given Cranton's (2002) characterization that simply thinking differently can constitute action, along with Mezirow's (1991) own suggestion that transformative learning is best understood as a process rather than as a product, researchers may examine how individuals' experiences reflect any stage of transformative learning. However, thinking and acting upon revised assumptions indicates that perspective transformation has occurred (Cranton, 2002). If an individual's perspective transformation leads to an increased awareness of privilege and oppression and an abandonment of ethnocentric beliefs, then the process represents progress toward a more inclusive society that respects different identities. However, if an individual's perspective transformation results in actions that help to confront injustices and dismantle systems of oppression, then the process represents the type of progress that can perhaps transform not just the individual but others as well. Individuals who become more aware of and alter their own biases through transformative learning have made personal progress but even more so if the transformation increases their sense of agency and commitment as social justice allies.

Transformative Learning and Adolescents. Although transformative learning is considered an adult learning theory, it can and should apply to adolescents as well. Most studies apply transformative learning to adult contexts, but some scholars have addressed its application to adolescents. While still characterizing transformative learning as an adult theory, Illeris (2014) noted that "there must be a development through childhood and youth setting the scene and conditions on which the transformations take place" (p.

157). By the time they reach high school, many adolescents have opinions and perspectives that have been shaped by their experiences and by individuals in their lives. However, their perspectives may be more open to change than the perspectives held by adults, for the latter have had more time to solidify their belief systems. Adults are more set in their ways and might need a greater motivation to change than adolescents. In other words, by the time individuals are adults, they may be less likely to transform elements of their identities (Illeris, 2014). As Illeris (2014) asserted, “To deal with transformative learning in youth is both important and demanding for the learners as well as for those who try to help and support them” (p. 159). Perhaps adolescents, then, are more likely than adults to have the type of epiphany or collection of experiences that can spark transformative learning. Perhaps their beliefs and assumptions are less ingrained and therefore more open to perspective transformation.

Transformative learning theory has been applied to adolescents in previous studies, although rarely and even more rarely in relation to anti-bias and social justice education (Harrell-Levy et al., 2016). In one study that applied transformative learning theory to adolescents, Walker and Molnar (2013) argued that authentic science inquiry represented a transformative learning experience for Canadian high school students. After analyzing qualitative data from surveys and interviews with students, teachers, and scientists, the authors concluded that students transformed their perceptions of scientists and of themselves. Walker and Molnar (2013) noted that no matter the discipline to which transformative learning is applied, it “is focused on what has happened for the learner as a whole person who is making sense of being in the world” (p. 232). In this case, the authors examined the data for evidence of the type of perspective and behavioral

change evident in transformative learning. In addition to transformed perspectives about science, some individuals altered their future career plans after the experience.

Meerts-Brandsma and Sibthorp (2021) also applied transformative learning theory to adolescents in their study of whether 15-18-year-old students achieved perspective transformation. In an explanatory sequential mixed methods study, the authors used King's (2009) Learning Activities Survey (LAS) as an instrument, concluding that significantly more students who attended semester schools had experienced transformative learning. Unlike traditional schools, the semester schools established conditions that were prime for transformation. One factor that facilitated the transformation included collaborative relationships with teachers in which students called teachers by their first names. Another factor included positive relationships with other students in the program. Although students had different perspectives from one another, they embraced a culture in which they worked together to achieve the same goals while affirming others' viewpoints. Other factors that facilitated transformation included reflection, the placement away from home, social aspects, and curriculum designed to challenge their current perspectives (Meerts-Brandsma & Sibthorp, 2021). In addition, Taylor's (1997) review of studies involving transformative learning found that relationships are critical to the transformative learning process. Thus, transformative learning is "dependent upon collaboration and creation of support, trust, and friendship with others" (Taylor, 1997, p. 53) much more than initially thought. Although much different from a semester school away from home, many of these same factors are components of the ADL Peer Training Program that this study explores. Therefore,

despite its often-assumed limitation as an adult learning theory, transformative learning can apply to adolescents' experiences when certain conditions are met.

Still other studies support the application of transformative learning theory to adolescents. Harrell-Levy et al. (2016) studied the teaching practices that facilitate transformative learning and concluded that the same practices that are transformative post-high school are applicable to high school students. In their study of a social justice program focusing on black urban youth, Harrell-Levy et al.'s (2016) results "suggest that the youth of high school-age students...may be more of an asset for meeting transformative goals than an impediment" (p. 94). In fact, teachers at the high school created "a sense of urgency, passion and idealism" (p. 94) which, the authors argue, have the potential to strengthen the program's impact on students' long-term perception of the world.

Transformative Learning and ADL Peer Training Program. Mezirow (2009) explicitly connected transformative learning and the potential to challenge an individual's "predisposition" (p. 93) to judge others outside one's own group as inferior. While many transformative learning studies occur through teacher preparation programs, as higher education institutions cite transformation as a teaching goal (Cranton, 2002), I could only find a few studies that connect transformative learning to adolescent learning. Furthermore, this study represents the first one to examine students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers through a transformative learning framework. While some may argue that three days of training is not enough time for adolescents to experience perspective transformation, this study seeks to understand in what ways participants' experiences reflect transformative learning, which may include any facet of the process. Still, King

(2009) noted that the process can begin after experiencing new educational content, and Cranton (2002) argued that it can begin by a trigger as simple as an unexpected question. Furthermore, while students become ADL Peer Trainers after three full days of learning, the workshops occur over the span of at least three weeks, giving participants additional time to reflect upon their learning. Finally, the goals of the ADL Peer Training program align with Cranton's (2002) facets to facilitate transformation. Students' experiences with the ADL Peer Training Program may reflect transformative learning with the program's emphasis on knowledge acquisition, critical self-reflection, and action. Given that Cranton's (2002) facets were conceptualized as strategies to teach for transformation, along with each facet's connection to the ADL Peer Training Program, I chose Cranton's (2002) model as a transformative learning framework through which to examine participants' experiences. Table 1 below shows how Cranton's (2002) facets of transformative learning parallel the ADL Peer Training Program.

Table 1

Cranton's Facets and the ADL Peer Training Program

Cranton's (2002, p. 66) Facets to Facilitate Transformation	ADL Peer Training Program
"An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read."	Participation in the three-day ADL Peer Training workshop.
"Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious."	Identifying current beliefs and assumptions about marginalized groups that may have been articulated to others or that are now conscious but held within the individual's mind.
"Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important."	Critically reflecting on beliefs or assumptions that contradict the goals and beliefs of the ADL Peer Training program.
"Being open to alternative viewpoints."	Considering new perspectives about different others.
"Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus."	Engaging in dialogue with peers and trainers throughout the three-day workshop.
"Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified."	Adopting new perspectives about diverse identities, implicit biases, and social justice.
"Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives."	Becoming an ADL Peer Trainer by running workshops for peers and showing other evidence of perspective transformation related to social justice; potential plans for action.

The Research Questions

The current study's purpose was to examine in what ways students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers in a predominately White, suburban high school reflect transformative learning. Another purpose of the current study was to examine the ways in which students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies, if at all. In other words, have their experiences in the three-day workshop and then as school trainers led to current and planned future actions as justice-oriented citizens who believe they can help create a more socially just school, community, and society? Finally, the current study explored in what ways participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers could inform social justice education in their high school. The question has implications for curricular and instructional changes that have the potential to transform students and society. The final research question is complementary to Snyder's (2008) suggestion that researchers should focus less on determining whether participants have achieved transformative learning and instead focus on how the process of transformative learning can inform curriculum and instruction.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I have argued that educational leaders and researchers need to better understand students' experiences with anti-bias training and social justice education in local contexts. Additionally, transformative learning theory can help researchers understand the ways in which students experience a perspective transformation that empowers them as social justice allies. Although traditionally an adult learning theory, transformative learning theory can and should be applied to adolescents,

for it can help researchers and practitioners understand how adolescents may transform into social justice-oriented citizens.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the experiences of students who were trained by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to serve as peer-to-peer anti-bias trainers at Spruce High School, a pseudonym for a predominately White, suburban high school in New Jersey. The study examined in what ways participants' experiences reflect transformative learning and empower them as social justice allies, as well as in what ways students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers could inform social justice education at Spruce High School.

This particularistic case study (Merriam, 1998) was bound by both a particular program, the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*, and the local context, Spruce High School. The units of analysis were two cohorts of ADL Peer Trainers who were solicited as volunteers through criterion sampling to engage in focus groups and invited to participate in one-on-one interviews for a more in-depth dialogue. In addition to focus groups and interviews, data collection included field notes taken during observations of the workshops in which the 2021 cohort of participants was trained by the ADL as Peer Trainers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the design of this case study:

1. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?
2. In what ways do students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies?

3. In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?

Goals of the Study

The current study had three main goals. First, given the potential for transformative learning experiences to result in perspective transformation and action (Mezirow, 1991), in this case toward social justice, I wondered in what ways participants' experiences as anti-bias trainers as part of Spruce High School's ADL Peer Training program reflected Cranton's (2002) seven facets of transformative learning. Examining in what ways participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers in a predominately White, suburban high school reflect transformative learning may help schools realize Bell's (2016) vision of an environment in which all individuals are "physically and psychologically safe and secure, recognized and treated with respect" (p. 1). A second goal of this study was to examine in what ways participants' experiences as anti-bias trainers empower them as social justice allies who believe they can create a more socially just school, community, and society. As explained in Chapter 1, this study defines empowerment by utilizing Russell et al.'s (2009) three dimensions: "Having and using knowledge" (p. 896); personal empowerment including "feeling good about oneself, having a voice, and having control or agency" (p. 897); and relationship empowerment as members of a group with a common goal to effect change in others. Finally, a third goal was to examine in what ways participants' experiences as anti-bias trainers in their local context could inform social justice education at Spruce High School. Many analyses of diversity programs and anti-bias interventions fail to capture participants' lived experiences, instead characterizing types of interventions in broad terms that lack context

or meaning at the local level. Gathering information about participants' experiences may help influence decisions about policy and practice at the local level, and participants' responses could have implications for how educators seek to transform schools into institutions for social justice.

Assumptions of and Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

I approached this study from a constructivist worldview, which posits that individuals construct meaning by reflecting on their experiences (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2014). This perspective influenced all aspects of the study, from the researcher's role to the process through which participants helped to create knowledge. As an educational leader who helps to create and implement social justice education programs in a high school setting, my professional role and background played a role in how I conceptualized the study, from its design to data analysis and discussion (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Not only did I construct knowledge through the interpretation of data, but so did participants through the process of reflecting on their own experiences as ADL Peer Trainers. Therefore, both participants and I became part of the study as we both constructed meaning—participants as they reflected upon and discussed their experiences, and the researcher as I designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, and interpreted the findings.

The constructivist worldview appropriately supports one of the frameworks through which I collected and analyzed data, Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, which posits that individuals create meaning through interpretation, and "since information, ideas, and contexts change, our present interpretations of reality are always subject to revision and replacement" (p. xiv). In addition to the notion that individuals

construct meaning, the study assumes that how individuals make sense of their experiences can change over time as they encounter new information, or as they engage in new experiences. To examine participants' experiences, then, I took a qualitative approach.

A Qualitative Approach

I used qualitative methods because I wanted to better understand the self-described experiences of ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School (Merriam, 1998). In this case, I examined how participants' experiences at Spruce High School reflect transformative learning, what their experiences revealed about their sense of agency and commitment to social justice, and in what ways their experiences could inform social justice education at Spruce High School.

Despite criticism that qualitative research studies have saturated the literature with post-experience interviews (Romano, 2018), I chose a qualitative design for the current study because most applications of transformative learning focus on adults, and there is a need for research that captures students' transformative experiences related to social justice education. Additionally, I could not find any quantitative transformative learning instruments that have been validated for use with adolescents. In a review of quantitative instruments, Romano (2018) noted that Kember et al.'s (2000) Reflective Questionnaire is limited to an evaluation of critical reflection, King's (2009) survey lacks validity and reliability, and Stuckey et al.'s (2013) Transformative Learning Survey has been validated only for college-educated adults.

Research Design

The Nature of Case Studies

Merriam (1998) used a fence analogy to describe the nature of case studies, which are bound by contexts and are “anchored in real-life situations” (p. 41). By describing the context of this study in detail, readers can determine to what extent the findings are applicable to their own contexts. However, consistent with the nature of case studies, generalizability is not a goal of this research (Stake, 1995). First, this study was bound by the school’s partnership with the ADL, including the nuances of how the ADL Peer Training Program was implemented at Spruce High School; by the context in which the program was implemented; and by the participants themselves. As a result, the case was particularistic in that it focused on what the research could reveal about participants’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers in a specific context (Merriam, 1998). Nevertheless, the findings could potentially improve practice at Spruce High School and possibly other contexts as determined by readers (Merriam, 1998). Further, the findings could potentially influence policymakers and, of course, future research related to transformative learning theory and social justice education (Merriam, 1998).

Context and Sampling

For qualitative studies, samples are typically small, nonrandom, and purposeful (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). In addition, case studies have multiple layers of sampling, including the setting of the case and the participants (Merriam, 1998). Below, I described how and why the setting and participants were selected for this study.

Setting. Spruce High School was selected as the location for this case study for several reasons. First, the school had implemented and was committed to the Anti-

Defamation League's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*. However, prior to this study there were no existing data on the learning experiences of student trainers in the local context. Because the study examined students' transformative learning experiences related to the program, Spruce High School met the first criterium. Second, the program has shown promising results as an anti-bias training program (Paluck, 2010). Examining ADL Peer Trainers' experiences with a promising anti-bias program in a predominately White, suburban setting could offer insight about whether and how young adults in this context develop a sense of agency and commitment to social justice. Additionally, examining participants' experiences could help inform decisions about social justice education at Spruce High School. Finally, as an educational leader and researcher, I had first-hand knowledge of program implementation in the high school, as well as access to the setting as an insider.

Spruce High School receives students from four different suburban and rural communities, and it is part of a regional high school district. During the 2019-2020 school year, the school consisted of 1,134 total students, 10.5% of whom were economically disadvantaged (NJ School Performance Report, 2020). In addition, for the 2019-2020 school year, the student body was 90.9% White, 4.1% Hispanic, 2.7% Black or African American, 1.6% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 0.5% two or more races (NJ School Performance Report, 2020). From this general school population, approximately 25 sophomores and juniors are selected every other year to be trained by the Anti-Defamation League as anti-bias trainers within the school.

In the spring of 2016-2017, 25 students and two staff members were trained by the ADL as the school's inaugural cohort. The following fall of 2017, an additional

cohort of 25 sophomores and juniors and two staff members were trained, and the program continued as the school trained a new cohort every other year. Thus, an additional group was trained in the fall of 2019, and another group in the fall of 2021. This pattern ensured that as ADL Peer Trainers graduate from high school, a new group of ADL Peer Trainers replaced them, promoting program continuity. The program promised to serve as a sustainable, ongoing anti-bias program that could empower students to run workshops for their peers. During the first phase of the program, two representatives from the ADL visited the school to conduct the training in a classroom, and trainees were provided with student manuals. Although the trainers from the ADL planned and implemented the three-day workshop, administrators at the school determined how the program would be implemented. As an Assistant Principal in the school at the time, I worked with students and staff to create a plan for implementing the program school-wide. It should be noted that the program was implemented with fidelity to the program's intent; ADL Peer Trainers played an active role in designing workshops based upon the school's needs. Given the school's commitment to the ADL Peer Training program, it served as an ideal setting to conduct research on students' experiences and their commitment to social justice related to their roles as ADL Peer Trainers.

Sampling. The sample for this study was selected from students who were already chosen from the general school population to serve as ADL Peer Trainers. Appendix A provides information about how students were selected to become ADL Peer Trainers. From the 23 juniors and seniors who were 2020-2021 ADL Peer Trainers and 27 students who were selected from the general school population for 2021-2022, I solicited volunteers for this study.

Participant Criteria. I relied on nonprobability sampling, a strategy typical for qualitative studies, to select participants (Merriam, 1998). More specifically, I used criterion sampling (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2017), inviting all students who met the criteria required to answer the study's research questions to participate. Criteria for focus groups and interviews included the students who were trained by the ADL as Peer Trainers at Spruce High School in 2019 or 2021, while criteria for field note observations included the students who were trained by the ADL in 2021. The 2019 ADL Peer Training cohort was not included in this portion of the study because their ADL Peer Training workshops took place prior to the beginning of this study.

Recruitment. Because the study examined the experiences of ADL Peer Trainers, all 50 students who met the basic criteria were invited to take part as participants. To recruit focus group and interview participants from the cohorts of ADL Peer Trainers, I sent an e-mail and a text via Remind, an app that I currently use to communicate with ADL Peer Trainers, and I posted on the group's Google Classroom. I emphasized that participation was completely voluntary. Only students who responded to the request were included in the study, mitigating any pressure that students may have felt to participate given my role as an Assistant Principal in the school. Each student who agreed to participate, along with the individual's parent or guardian if they were minors, was asked to sign an informed consent agreement (Appendix B).

Because some participants may have been interested in an interview but not necessarily focus groups, extending the invitation to engage in a one-on-one interview gave them an opportunity to participate in the study through a more private medium.

Table 2 below shows the number of students who were invited to participate in the research study from each of the ADL Peer Training cohort years, the number that agreed to participate in the focus groups, and the breakdown of one-on-one interview participants.

Table 2

Potential Versus Actual Participants

ADL Peer Training Cohort Year	Number of Students Invited to Participate in the Research Study	Total Number of Students that Agreed to Participate in Focus Groups	Total Number of Students that Agreed to Participate in one-on-one interviews
2019-2020	23	9	11
2021-2022	27	10	8

Limitations

One limitation of the study was that the population of ADL Peer Trainers from which participants were solicited may have been more likely to experience transformative learning than students in the general school population, given that prospective ADL Peer Trainers were recommended by teachers as good candidates for the program. Then, from the population of ADL Peer Trainers, individuals who agreed to participate in this research study also may have been more likely to experience transformative learning than students who chose not to participate. It is possible that individuals whose experiences did not reflect transformative learning were less motivated to engage in a research study related to their roles as ADL Peer Trainers.

Another important consideration related to the participants were the differences in experiences of the two cohorts. The 2019 cohort was trained by the ADL several years prior to this study, and they had the opportunity to turnkey trainings in their school; however, the 2021 cohort completed ADL Peer Training but did not have the opportunity to turnkey the training prior to this study. Nevertheless, the study was designed to capture the range of experiences of ADL Peer Trainers. Furthermore, most but not all individuals from both cohorts experienced ADL Peer Training workshops as freshmen and sophomores, before they became the trainers themselves. Some participants referred to these experiences during focus groups and interviews.

A final important consideration was related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2019 cohort implemented virtual workshops for their peers during the 2020-2021 school year, which differed from the traditional, in-person setting. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had no effect on the three days of training for either cohort.

Data Collection

Data collection took place at Spruce High School, both in person and via Zoom, and it included taking field notes during the workshops in which students were trained to become ADL Peer Trainers, conducting focus groups, and engaging participants in one-on-one interviews. Utilizing three types of data sources triangulated the findings (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Prior to soliciting participants and conducting research, I acquired approval from Rowan University's Institutional Review Board, from the school district's Assistant Superintendent, and from the Anti-Defamation League Peer Training instructors. Following the acquisition of participant and parent/guardian consent, I scheduled focus groups and one-on-one interviews with the 2019 peer training cohort.

Next, I scheduled observations of the workshops in which the 2021 cohort of students were trained by the ADL. After the three-day workshop, I scheduled focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews with the 2021 cohort of students. Thus, data collection included the following:

1. 2019 cohort focus groups and interviews
2. 2021 cohort observation field notes
3. 2021 cohort focus groups and interviews

Table 3 below includes a general timeline of the research study sorted by type of data.

Table 3

Data Collection Timeline

Data Collection	Cohort	Number of Participants	Dates
Focus Group 1	2019	3	10/12/2021
Focus Group 2	2019	3	10/14/2021
Focus Group 3	2019	3	11/29/2021
Focus Group 4	2021	5	12/8/2021
Focus Group 5	2021	5	12/20/2021
Interviews	2019	11	10/2021-11/2021
	2021	8	12/2021
ADL Peer		27	11/12/2021
Training Field	2021	27	11/23/2021
Notes		27	12/2/2021

Focus Groups. Focus groups were used to engage participants in a discussion about their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, and the questions were designed to answer Research Questions 2 and 3. Participants were asked to reflect broadly on their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, and they were prompted to discuss their perceived

impact on their peers and school. In addition, participants were asked to provide recommendations for creating a more inclusive school environment.

Focus groups consisted of three to five participants each, a number which strengthens engagement from each participant and increases their comfort level (Morgan, 2019). Engaging in focus groups can help participants reflect on their own thoughts and consider others' ideas, possibly shifting their own perspectives (Morgan, 2019). Thus, the process itself can help participants make sense of their experiences. Although some may argue that participants can be influenced by others in a focus group (Morgan, 2019), the nature of transformative learning involves reflecting on assumptions, engaging in dialogue with others, and being open to different points of view (Mezirow, 1991; Cranton, 2002). Therefore, the use of focus groups not only was appropriate as participants could interact with one another and support, refute, or qualify the responses of their peers, but the method of data collection was complementary to the nature of transformative learning.

For this study, focus groups were segmented, or separated by cohort (Morgan, 2019). Participants were divided by the year they were trained by the ADL. The cohort that the ADL trained in 2019 engaged in the three-day workshop in the fall of 2019, and the students had served as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School since then. At the time focus groups were conducted, participants from the 2019 cohort were high school seniors and recent high school graduates. The cohort that the ADL trained in 2021 more recently engaged in the three-day workshop and had no practical experience turnkeying the training to their peers at the time of this study. Participants from the 2021 cohort were sophomores and juniors in high school. Segmenting focus groups was designed to

increase participants' comfort, for they were grouped by peers they got to know through the ADL Peer Training program. Focus group interviews took place both at Spruce High School and via Zoom. Before facilitating focus group discussions, I again acquired permission and recorded through Rev, an audio recording app, or through Zoom, depending on the setting.

Interviews. Interviews were used to acquire more in-depth data about students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers that could help answer in what ways participants' experiences reflect transformative learning. All students who were trained by the ADL as part of the 2019 and 2021 cohorts were invited to engage in a one-on-one interview. This strategy gave those who did not participate in focus groups an opportunity to take part in the study while giving focus group participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in more depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I chose both focus groups and interviews because studies improve as they benefit from the strengths of both methods (Morgan, 2019). I conducted semi-structured interviews with a list of pre-determined, open-ended questions to promote depth and allow for follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To prevent students from missing class, interviews took place outside the school day or during study hall. Before conducting each interview, I again acquired permission to record from each participant.

Field Notes from ADL Peer Training Workshop Observations. The third data source included field notes from observations of the three-day ADL Peer Training workshops that took place in the fall of 2021. I observed the multi-day workshops and took field notes on everything that I believed could help answer the study's research questions (Patton, 2002). More specifically, I noted participants' statements that reflected

one or more of Cranton's (2002) seven facets of transformative learning, as well as participants' experiences related to social justice education at Spruce High School. During the workshops, ADL Peer Trainers engaged in a series of activities that required them to reflect on their own backgrounds, identities, and biases while learning how to facilitate similar workshops for others. Observing participants as they engaged in training to become anti-bias trainers revealed insight about the ways in which participants' experiences reflect transformative learning and empower them as social justice allies. Through observing the ADL Peer Training workshops, I listened for and noted any evidence that could potentially answer one or more of this study's research questions. In addition, the ADL Peer Training workshops occurred during the school day, consistent with past practice.

Instrumentation

To collect data, I developed protocols for the focus groups (Appendix C), one-on-one interviews (Appendix D), and field notes taken during observations of the ADL Peer Training workshops (Appendix E). The focus group and interview protocols included an introduction, an explanation of the purpose, informed consent, and a series of questions designed to solicit data aligned with the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Questions also reflected the study's conceptual frameworks, transformative learning theory and social justice education. Prior to conducting focus groups and one-on-one interviews, I conducted pilot interviews (Merriam, 1998) with three individuals, one from Rowan University's Ed. D. program, one educator at Spruce High School who was trained by the Anti-Defamation League as a staff member, and one English teacher at Spruce High School. All three individuals provided feedback on the data collection

protocols related to research question alignment and clarity, and their feedback was used to strengthen the protocols.

Focus Groups. For focus groups, I developed a protocol (Appendix C) with a less structured approach (Morgan, 2019) to better understand participants' thinking.

Therefore, questions were used to guide the discussion, but participants were encouraged to interact with one another and build upon each other's responses (Morgan, 2019). The focus group protocol began with an opening question and progressed by topic (Morgan, 2019). Throughout the discussion, I used probes such as "What else?" "Who can give an example of something like that?" and "Does anyone have a different thought?" (Morgan, 2019, p. 5). Each focus group interview ended with a wrap-up question that asked each participant to summarize what they thought were the key points from the discussion.

Interviews. For the interview protocol (Appendix D), I developed a series of semi-structured, pre-determined open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) to solicit information about participants' experiences in line with Research Question 1. Specific questions designed to reveal how Spruce High School students' experiences reflected transformative learning were informed by Dr. Kathleen P. King's (2009) *Learning Activities Survey* (LAS). As the original developer, King's (2009) instrument was designed for "identifying whether adult learners have had a perspective transformation in relation to their educational experience; and if so, determining what learning activities have contributed to it" (p. 14). Although this study's purpose differed from the purpose for which King's instrument was designed, the LAS helped the researcher conceptualize interview questions designed to answer Research Question 1.

Field Notes. Field notes taken during ADL Peer Training took place in a classroom at Spruce High School over three days in the fall of 2021. Participants included up to 27 sophomores and juniors at Spruce High School who were recommended by English teachers and by the multicultural club adviser as good candidates for Spruce High School’s ADL Peer Training program. While participants’ actual names were used during data collection, each was assigned a pseudonym in the written report.

I took field notes to document the physical setting, social interactions, and activities to later recall details and provide a thorough description for the reader (Patton, 2002). The field note protocol (Appendix E) included space to record the activity, what participants were saying, and researcher reflections (Merriam, 1998). The field note protocol also reflected this study’s purpose and therefore included the research questions for reference (Merriam, 1998). While observing the ADL Peer Training workshops and taking field notes, I did not engage with participants as part of the workshop. This strategy provided the opportunity for careful observation and note-taking.

Table 4 below shows how each research question corresponded to data collection strategies, conceptual frameworks, and specific focus group and interview questions.

Table 4*Research Question Matrix*

RQ	Method/Type of Data	Theory/Application	Questions
1. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?	Interviews Field Notes	Transformative Learning Theory	Interview Questions 1-7
2. In what ways do students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies?	Focus Groups Field Notes	Transformative Learning Theory Social Justice Education	Focus Group Questions 1-2
3. In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?	Focus Groups Field Notes	Social Justice Education	Focus Group Questions 3-6

Data Analysis

I began analyzing data along the way, as it was collected (Merriam, 1998). I transcribed focus groups and interviews within a day or two of conducting them by utilizing the transcriptions provided by Zoom, by manually listening to recordings and transcribing, or by replaying recordings and using the transcribe feature of Google Recorder. Next, I replayed recordings to revise transcripts and check for accuracy.

Through this process, I became more familiar with participants' responses, and I wrote in-process analytic memos in "exploratory, open-ended narrative style" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 250) to capture initial thoughts about how participants' responses connected to the research questions. These memos provided an opportunity to explore my initial assumptions and "naturalistic generalizations," or conclusions (Stake, 1995), about the focus group, interview, and field note data.

For each of the three days of ADL Peer Training workshop observations, I reviewed field notes and sorted data by the research questions to which they applied. I also wrote brief, in-process analytic memos to capture my thinking (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

To help organize and recognize patterns in coded data, I utilized Dedoose, a data management and analysis software. As a first cycle coding technique, I used structural coding to categorize segments of data into large topical areas (Saldaña, 2016). Using this method, I coded focus group, interview, and field note transcripts based upon the research question to which segments of data applied. Thus, data were coded with a 1, 2, or 3, corresponding to the study's three research questions. Next, because the study examined in what ways participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflected transformative learning, I developed a "provisional list of codes" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 71) connected to research question 1 in advance, basing the codes upon Cranton's (2002) seven facets of transformative learning. These codes helped to further categorize all data connected to the first research question. Table 5 below shows the preliminary codes assigned to each facet.

Table 5

Preliminary Codes Assigned to Cranton's (2002) Seven Facets

Cranton's (2002) Facets to Facilitate Transformation	Preliminary Code
"An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read."	Activating Event
"Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious."	Articulating assumptions
"Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important."	Critical self-reflection
"Being open to alternative viewpoints."	Open to alternative views
"Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus."	Engaging in dialogue
"Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified."	Revising assumptions
"Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives."	Acting

Once data were grouped by research question and facet of transformative learning, I used in vivo coding as a second cycle to categorize larger segments of data

into more meaningful and more specific units of data, and to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). Given that adolescents’ voices are often marginalized, and since this study examined participants’ experiences, coding data by capturing participants’ language verbatim was an appropriate strategy (Saldaña, 2016).

Next, as a third cycle of coding, I used pattern coding to reduce the number of similar in vivo codes into fewer and more meaningful groups that reflected the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Grouping the data by theme, or “theming the data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 199), is appropriate for any qualitative study, especially those that focus on participants’ beliefs and experiences (Saldaña, 2016). The data dictated the specific themes; however, I used the research questions and the study’s conceptual framework to guide this process, and I exported the codes from Dedoose to Microsoft Excel to manage the data and keep track of emerging generalizations.

Trustworthiness

As the qualitative researcher, I was very much a part of the study, what Merriam (1998) called “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 7). In this case, my role as an Assistant Principal and Supervisor of Instruction within the research context brought many advantages and some disadvantages. Readers may question whether my close personal ties to the research context could ensure objectivity. However, my familiarity to research participants may have improved the quality of their responses as I already had their trust as an insider. Similarly, my familiarity with the ADL Peer Training Program and how it was implemented at Spruce High School was an asset for understanding the study’s context. In addition, I took steps to promote trustworthiness and used rich description to support the conclusions.

Given the subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry (Stake, 1995), I took steps to validate the findings through methodological triangulation, member checking, and considering alternative explanations.

Triangulation

I utilized methodological triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of my interpretations (Stake, 1995). In this case, constantly comparing field notes taken during observation of ADL Peer Training workshops, focus group transcripts, and one-on-one interview transcripts helped to triangulate the interpretations through multiple data sources.

Member Checking

After conducting one-on-one interviews, I engaged in member checking (Merriam, 1998), providing a copy of the interview transcript to participants to give them the opportunity to check for accuracy and make revisions. In addition, during data analysis, I noted any contradictory statements made by participants during observations, within a focus group or interview, or between two methods for those who participated in more than one, and I checked with the participant to clarify any contradictions.

Considering Alternative Explanations

Finally, I took steps to consider alternative explanations for the study's conclusions to "disconfirm [my] own interpretations" (Stake, 1995, p. 48). Openly discussing alternative interpretations and weighing them against the conclusions strengthened the study's credibility for the reader.

Role of the Researcher/Positionality

As established, qualitative research assumes that the researcher plays an important role in the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 1995), for data is mediated through the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Similarly, it is critical for both readers and researcher to consider any potential researcher biases (Merriam, 1998). As a result, I have discussed personal biases to both strengthen the study's trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998) and in the interest of transparency.

Both my personal ethic and my professional role as an Assistant Principal at Spruce High School influenced the current study, from its conceptualization to the interpretation of findings. Given my tendency to empathize with those who are marginalized, it would come as no surprise to those who know me that this study examined participants' experiences related to an anti-bias program. Philosophically, I support programs that are designed to promote understanding of differences and combat both overt and implicit biases, and I think schools should play a critical role in implementing these programs. Although I grew up in a predominately White, working-class community, as an undergraduate student and English major at The College of New Jersey, I took many courses that explored the ways in which individuals and groups have been historically marginalized. In addition, as a member of the LGBTQ community, I am a minority in terms of my sexual orientation. All these experiences contributed to my belief that anti-bias programs are beneficial to students, schools, communities, and society in general.

Second, for the past six years, I have been an Assistant Principal, and in that role, I supervised the ADL Peer Training program at Spruce High School since its inception.

My personal connection to the program came with some advantages, such as my familiarity with the program content and how it was implemented at Spruce High School. However, I also acknowledge that my personal connection to the program could invite reader skepticism about my impartiality. Prior to conducting this research, I believed that diversity enriches the learning environment and that the ADL Peer Training Program has had a positive effect not just on ADL Peer Trainers, but on the climate at Spruce High School. However, this study was not a program evaluation. Rather, examining in what ways participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning, in what ways participants' experiences empower them as social justice allies, and in what ways their experiences could inform social justice education at Spruce High School may contribute to policy and practice, particularly at the local level, and to research more generally. However, to mitigate any potential concerns, and in the interest of quality qualitative research designed to capture participants' lived experiences, I have utilized rich, thick description when discussing the findings (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Furthermore, as discussed above, I engaged in member checking, triangulated the data through focus groups, interviews, and field notes, and I addressed alternative explanations for the conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent and IRB Approval

The required coursework and trainings as part of Rowan University's Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program has prepared me to design and conduct ethical research. In preparation for conducting research, I had completed the

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which was designed to protect human participants.

In planning to conduct the study, I had considered ethics at all stages of the design and followed formal approval procedures throughout the process. First, I collaborated with my dissertation chair and committee to receive their input regarding ethical considerations, integrating their feedback into the research design. Next, I acquired IRB approval through Rowan University. In addition, I acquired institutional permission from Spruce High School, as well as individual and parent/guardian permission to engage participants as part of the research. Each participant and their parent/guardian (if they were minors) signed and returned acknowledgement of informed consent (Rossman & Rallis, 2014).

Confidentiality

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I took steps to maintain the confidentiality of participants. First, I used a pseudonym for the setting, Spruce High School. In addition, during focus groups, I explained to participants the importance of confidentiality and reminded them that what other participants share during the focus group discussion should be kept confidential and not discussed outside the focus group. As ADL Peer Trainers, participants were accustomed to the notion of trust, as they routinely explain the importance of confidentiality to the individuals they train in workshops. To further preserve confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym for references to data in the dissertation. Moreover, the interview recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected electronic device and computer.

Power Dynamics

As an Assistant Principal in the school, and as the administrator who coordinates the ADL Peer Training program, I sought to mitigate the imbalance of power by explaining to participants that they should respond sincerely and that I have no expectation for the content of their responses. In other words, the authenticity of the research relies upon their honesty, even if they think their response is something that I would not want to hear. Additionally, I chose to conduct focus groups and interviews in a classroom or virtually rather than in an office, and during in-person interviews I intentionally sat in one of the student chairs to avoid the symbolic power dynamic of an administrator sitting in an office or of an educator sitting in the front of a classroom. Finally, to prevent participants from feeling obligated to take part in the study, I solicited participation through electronic invitation rather than by asking participants individually or directly.

Benefits Versus Risks

The current research study may provide insight for policy, practice, and future research related to social justice education and transformative learning theory. One goal of the study was to examine whether participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning. As a result, the interview and focus group questions were designed to engage students in critical reflection. Mezirow (2009) described the first stage of transformative learning as a "disorienting dilemma" in which individuals encounter new information or experiences that contradict previous beliefs or assumptions. For any individual, experiencing a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 2009) could potentially be uncomfortable. However, this study sought to engage students in

critical reflection about their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, not to engage students in learning that could *cause* a disorienting dilemma. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, Cranton's (2002) characterization of the first stage of transformative learning is as an "activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has already assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read" (p. 66). In this case, there was a chance that participants' experiences did not reflect any evidence of transformative learning. However, if participants' experiences did reflect transformative learning, they already would have experienced the "activating event" (Cranton, 2002, p. 66) through their roles as ADL Peer Trainers. It is certainly possible that the type of reflection prompted by focus group or interview questions could trigger transformative learning (Cranton, 2002); however, reflecting on one's experiences through metacognition can have cognitive benefits (Winne & Azevedo, 2014). Finally, engaging high school students in a research study can be empowering. Levin (2000) noted that students' voices are often left out of educational reform, resulting in a missed opportunity to empower students and learn from their experiences. Levin (2000) added that "students have unique knowledge and perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful and improve their implementation" (p. 156). For sure, examining students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School not only can empower those students, but it can provide insight that can help other students as well.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this case study was to examine participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School, a predominately White, suburban high school in New Jersey. More specifically, I examined in what ways participants' experiences reflected transformative learning and empowered them as social justice allies, as well as in what ways participants' experiences could inform social justice education at Spruce High School. Research questions included the following:

1. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?
2. In what ways do students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies?
3. In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?

In the remainder of the chapter, I provided relevant information about research participants and organized findings by themes that emerged from data collection and analysis.

Research Participants

Data collection took place from November-December, 2021. Of the 50 students who were invited to take part in the research study, 22 unique participants engaged in either a one-on-one interview, a focus group, or both. In fact, 16 participants engaged in both interviews and focus groups. I conducted 19 total one-on-one interviews with 11 participants from the 2019 cohort and eight from the 2021 cohort. Additionally, I

conducted five total focus groups. As discussed in Chapter 3, focus groups were segmented by cohort. I conducted three focus groups with the 2019 cohort consisting of three participants each, and two from the 2021 cohort consisting of five participants each. From the 2019 cohort, five participants were seniors in high school, while seven were first-year college students. From the 2021 cohort, six participants were sophomores in high school and four were juniors. Table 6 lists each participant by pseudonym, including the cohort to which they belonged, their gender, and whether they engaged in an interview, a focus group, or both.

Table 6

Research Participants

Participant	Cohort	Gender	Focus Group	Interview
Ariella	2019	F	x	x
Tara	2019	F	x	x
Kyle	2019	M	x	x
Norah	2019	F	x	x
Crystal	2019	F	x	x
Brelynn	2019	F	x	x
Tim	2019	M	x	x
Sarah	2019	F		x
Sophie	2019	F		x
James	2019	M	x	
Kelly	2019	F		x
Shawn	2019	M	x	x
Jonathan	2021	M	x	x
Ellie	2021	F	x	
Hailey	2021	F	x	x
Josh	2021	M	x	x
Jimmy	2021	M	x	x
Christy	2021	F	x	x
Denise	2021	F	x	x
Harleigh	2021	F	x	x
Veronica	2021	F	x	
Stella	2021	F	x	x

Note. Participants’ racial and ethnic demographic data is not reflected in the table because it was not part of the IRB approval process.

Furthermore, I collected field notes throughout three full days during which 27 individuals from the 2021 cohort were trained by two trainers from the Anti-Defamation League.

Themes

An analysis of interview, focus group, and field notes data yielded eight themes related to participants’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School. Themes

included “shifting from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective,” “employing empathy,” “finding value in disagreement,” “seeing others as multidimensional individuals,” “shifting from bystander to upstander,” “prioritizing respect to challenge bias,” “developing an interest in social justice beyond Spruce High School,” and “developing a positive self-image.”

Theme 1: Shifting from an Exclusive to an Inclusive Perspective

Data indicated that participants shifted from an exclusive perspective to a more inclusive one. As they adopted a more inclusive perspective, participants critically reflected upon how the families and communities in which they were raised limited their and others’ perspectives. According to participants, the lack of diversity in their high school and community, combined with beliefs that are passed down generationally and with limited outside influence, cultivated a narrow worldview. Shawn’s characterization of the local community emphasized the traditional and conservative social values held by many:

We kind of grew up with our way of thinking, and it's not always the same as the other areas in the state, like I would say we're more of a red area where a lot of Jersey are blue.

Shawn added, “I would say our area of South Jersey is not always known for being the most accepting.” Participants’ characterization of the local school and community underscored how individuals who have diverse identities may feel like outsiders in the local context.

Participants also discussed their community’s exclusivity by contrasting it with more diverse areas, a concept illustrated by Brelynn’s juxtaposition of their “small town”

which is “built in tradition” with urban areas where “people are fluctuating, opinions are fluctuating.” Brelynn’s explanation captured how participants’ exclusive beliefs were passed on from one generation to the next without outside influence: “It’s like my dad taught me this, and his dad taught him that, and his dad taught him that, so that’s why I believe it.” Although careful not to criticize their community, participants’ descriptions of the local context indicated that they and their peers lacked exposure to diverse people and ideas, which created a generational cycle of exclusive perspectives.

As a result of their family’s and community’s influence on their worldview, combined with limited exposure to diverse people and ideas, participants described their environment as a “bubble.” Once they became aware of the “bubble” and its role in fostering and reinforcing an exclusive perspective, they began to shift toward a more inclusive one. For example, Ariella used an analogy of emerging from a cocoon to describe a transition in which she realized her own beliefs could and did differ from her family’s beliefs:

I was raised in this bubble with my family and grew up thinking how they thought, and I followed their beliefs. Now that I’m grown up a little more, I can expand my beliefs beyond theirs, not necessarily because theirs are ‘wrong,’ but because I can get out of the little cocoon and believe for myself.

Participants’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers helped them recognize that their beliefs were shaped by the environment in which they were raised, and they realized that their beliefs previously were limited to what their families thought. Crystal’s reflection on how her beliefs were initially shaped and limited by her upbringing captured this realization:

I came from a very I guess myopic view in homeschooling where I was in a predominately Christian atmosphere in education around mainly people who thought the same as me, so I knew coming into ADL that I didn't have that much of an awareness about other cultures and how other people perceive how they're treated.

Participants' responses demonstrated a shift in perspective from individuals who were products of a homogenous community to individuals who became aware of the limitations of their environment, as evident in Tim's comments:

Another one [belief or attitude that was altered] wasn't something that I had to focus on growing up, the idea of appreciation and respect for everyone of different backgrounds and sexual orientations because...where I'm from there isn't much diversity in any of those things.

As participants explained, their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers marked a shift from a narrow perspective to one that was more inclusive and open to change. Participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers helped them to, as Tim stated, "learn about every type of background and instantly gain respect [for those with different backgrounds]." While growing up, participants did not think about the experiences of diverse others because their context lacked visible diversity. As an example, noted in the field notes, one participant admitted, "People on the outskirts don't really cross my mind. I usually think about myself and my friends." However, their experiences as Peer Trainers marked a shift from a narrow worldview resulting in exposure to both diversity and new ideas that are reflective of other areas of the United States.

Participants recognized that through their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, they adopted a more inclusive perspective that prepared them for life in a diverse society, a concept well-summarized by Ariella: “I was very close minded before and being exposed to all the information that I’ve learned through the 18 hours of training...I just feel a lot more aware of the world around me, and I’m very thankful for that.” Thus, many participants’ experiences marked a shift from an exclusive perspective to one that was more inclusive and worldly.

Opening their Eyes to Inequality and Privilege. As they shifted to a more inclusive perspective, participants attributed their roles as ADL Peer Trainers to an increased awareness of the inequality that minoritized or marginalized individuals and groups face. For example, Tara explained, “I’ve learned a lot just about racial inequity and inequality in general, not just stats and facts and data, but more bigger concepts and ideas that I never really would’ve thought of outside of ADL.” Participants admitted that prior to their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, their knowledge of social inequality was limited. Ariella’s comment provides another example of this shift: “Going through the training, seeing, understanding and doing the workshops furthered my understanding of what others experience in terms of prejudice, racism, and inequality.” In fact, participants described their increase in knowledge of and empathy for those who are marginalized as “eye-opening,” as evident in Norah’s reflection:

To see that other people were bullied based off the color of their skin, or their origin or who they were, even religious wise, it’s so sad that I didn’t even know that was happening, and I wish I did know. I think it really made me realize that

just because it's not happening to me or the people who were directly around me, it's still happening to others. I think that was really an eye-opening thing for me. Participants' perspectives began to shift as they learned that several peers had some negative experiences at Spruce High School, and that there was an apparent relationship between one's identity and how they are treated.

Furthermore, through dialogue with their peers and engaging in activities during training, participants became more aware of the experiences of people of color specifically. Kelly's comment captured this increased awareness:

I mean I never really thought about all the difficulties that people of color and Black people face, and we had some really good conversations in class discussions about that kind of stuff because you know, as a White person, that's not what I think about, and so to have somebody else's perspective on things like that really helped me grow.

White participants realized that they did not think about race in the same way that people of color do, and they exhibited personal growth by understanding more about the experiences of people of color. Kelly even remarked, "It made me a better person." Thus, data showed that participants adopted a more inclusive perspective specifically related to the inequality and inequity that marginalized groups experience.

In addition, participants recognized the impact that microaggressions could have on others, which opened their eyes to inequality and, in some cases, their own privilege. Ariella, for example, acknowledged how commonplace microaggressions are:

I notice that a lot of people go through dealing with certain microaggressions a lot more than I originally thought. When we are teaching about microaggressions and

I see all the hands go up, they say I've been told this, or someone said this to me.

It's always a little surprising because growing up, I've never had many derogatory insults/comments directed at me, and seeing how many people are affected by it every day is surprising and hurts a little.

Learning about their peers' experiences helped participants recognize their own privilege and opened their eyes to inequality. While most participants' responses implied an awareness of their privilege, Norah explicitly acknowledged her privilege at Spruce High School as a White, cis-gender, athletic female: "I am privileged. I've never really been judged like, I know I'm an athlete, I'm white, I've never really been a minority. I'm in the majority." Acknowledging their own privilege helped participants become more sensitive to the experiences of others, signaling a shift to an inclusive, other-centered perspective, as Tara's reflection captured:

I think that one of the lessons that really impacted me was the microaggressions. I think before ADL, I didn't realize how significant those little comments could be. And if it came from a joking matter or didn't have the intention of harming another person, I thought *why does it really matter?* But through ADL training I learned that it really can, regardless of intention, impact someone in a negative manner.

Prior to their experiences as Peer Trainers, participants would sometimes blame the target for being too sensitive, noting, "that's kind of on you," as Tara did, whereas after, they would blame the individual who made the microaggression. Participants demonstrated a more inclusive perspective and an awareness of inequality as they developed empathy for individuals who are often the target of microaggressions or identity-related jokes.

In sum, the data showed that participants shifted from an exclusive perspective that was informed and limited by their families and community to one that was more inclusive and cognizant of the experiences of diverse others.

Theme 2: Employing Empathy

Participants' responses indicated that they began employing empathy through their thoughts and language. First, participants began making conscious efforts to put themselves in others' shoes. Second, they began engaging in internal dialogues, more carefully considering their language during interactions with others to avoid making anyone feel uncomfortable or othered. While participants may have had some degree of empathy prior to their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, the data showed that they employed empathy as a strategy to both better understand others' perspectives and experiences, and to ensure that the language they used reflected cultural sensitivity.

Participants recognized and explicitly stated that due to their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, they had begun putting themselves in others' shoes, in many cases for the first time, as Tara noted: "[I] hadn't really done that before." The process of imagining how others feel marked a conscious shift, as Jonathan's reflection illustrated: "It's [my experiences have] definitely made me more empathetic, I guess you can say, like to put myself in other people's shoes and see what's happening." The consensus was that participants began putting themselves in others' shoes because they saw the value in understanding others' perspectives and experiences, especially those that differed from their own.

Participants showed maturity as they realized that they needed to think about others' feelings instead of just thinking about their own experiences. Hailey's explanation captured this concept:

One of the biggest takeaways that I had was putting myself in others' shoes... I was constantly reminded like, okay, when thinking about this, I need to think about how everyone can feel instead of just using my own experiences.

The process of putting themselves in others' shoes helped participants recognize that some of their peers did not perceive Spruce High School as a welcoming place, and they became "more aware that people might feel like an outsider," as Hailey noted. By employing empathy, participants became more mindful of others' experiences and illustrated a genuine desire to relate to others who may have had different experiences. The fact that participants consciously employed empathy as a strategy reflected their personal growth that resulted from their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers.

Participants also employed empathy by altering their language to avoid marginalizing others and to reinforce inclusivity. Because of their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, participants began thinking more carefully about the words they chose to avoid making others feel uncomfortable. Shawn captured this idea as he described what he learned as an ADL Peer Trainer that he previously did not know or consider: "Making sure that no matter what, you're not making anybody uncomfortable, even with jokes, even with a presentation in class...taking account of everybody and making sure that you're not making any one group of people...uncomfortable..." Reflecting the notion that participants employed empathy by altering their language, Shawn explained that he no longer made jokes that could harm others:

I've always been one that was pretty, not outspoken with jokes, but I wasn't afraid to make jokes with my friends that maybe some people might find offensive. I'll just put that out there. But afterwards, it was kind of like, is it worth it? Like that joke, it's really not that funny. And it might make people uncomfortable, so from then to now, I would say that is definitely a big difference. I just like don't make jokes like that anymore.

Shawn's admission illustrated how participants began employing empathy by choosing their language more carefully, not as a strategy to avoid consequences for making an inappropriate joke, but to prevent harming others with their words. While many participants already knew that words could have harmful effects on others, their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers deepened their commitment to using culturally sensitive language, as Jonathan's response indicated: "I've kind of already knew that [to think before you speak], but it kind of hit it home more, like just watch what you say. It could always hurt someone. You never know what someone's sensitive to." Employing empathy, participants began engaging in an internal dialogue prior to speaking, more carefully considering how their language could affect others.

Participants underscored the fact that they were more aware of how their words could harm others as they exercised caution to use culturally sensitive language. Stella captured this notion when she explained that she was "more cautious overall with how I speak to my friends and people who aren't my friends too." Participants employed empathy by approaching conversations with what Sarah described as a "filter, or cultural awareness in my head." Explaining in what ways she behaves or acts differently today compared to before she became an ADL Peer Trainer, Sarah told me, "At times I

sometimes stop myself and think, like is this the appropriate thing to say on this topic?” Sarah’s internal dialogue in which she employed empathy captured how participants began thinking more critically about what they said to avoid making an insensitive or stereotypical comment:

I definitely got almost like another filter of things, like before I speak on like the stereotype, or speak and it could be a microaggression, I always think a little bit more before I say something now. And I think that was something I didn't really do beforehand.

Many participants referred to acquiring a “filter,” which implied that they still had private thoughts that were stereotypical or rooted in ignorance; however, it is important to note that participants began altering their language out of genuine empathy for others. As another example, Crystal described the thought process used to overcome stereotypical thoughts that could cause harm:

And it’s [my experiences] made me more aware of which ideas and thoughts I need to say hold on, this may have popped in my head, but it doesn’t align with what I believe, and it doesn’t align with what I believe is going to be respectful and helpful in the situation.

Participants indicated that they chose their words more carefully, not to be politically correct, but to avoid marginalizing or disrespecting others.

In sum, participants connected their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers to an awareness of the power of language. As a result, they employed empathy by putting themselves in others’ shoes and more carefully considering their own words to avoid offending, disrespecting, or marginalizing others.

Theme 3: Finding Value in Disagreement

Data indicated that participants developed an appreciation for the value of disagreement, and they embraced engaging with and learning from their peers who had different opinions from their own. Sophie's reflection in which she contrasted how she felt about disagreement before she became an ADL Peer Trainer with her feelings after becoming a trainer captured a sentiment shared by participants: "Before I was an ADL Peer Trainer, I felt that disagreement was uncomfortable and something that we should stray from. And we shouldn't bring up topics that people are gonna have different views on." However, through their experiences as trainers, participants changed their views, as reflected in Sophie's comment: "I feel like that was just really a new concept for me and through those trainings I was able to understand just that it's okay to have civil discourse." Participants' experiences marked a transition from individuals who avoided disagreement to ones who came to see the value that an exchange of opposing views could have.

Through their experiences as Peer Trainers, participants recognized the value that disagreement could play in affirming or altering their perspectives. Veronica, for example, expressed the benefit of hearing alternative viewpoints and deciding whether to alter one's own view or respectfully disagree:

And it's really helpful to hear other people's opinions of things because they'll bring up a new opinion and you're like, oh wait, I never thought about that. I kind of agree with you, or it's like, no I don't agree, I've seen other things but understand where you're coming from.

Veronica's response illustrated the notion that participants found value in conversing with peers who had different opinions. Participants expressed that disagreement helped them think differently, and their respect for views that differed from their own showed that they saw value in hearing alternative perspectives. As another example, Denise discussed the value of engaging in dialogue with her fellow Peer Trainers, especially with those who had perspectives or beliefs that were different from her own: "Like they all have different opinions and beliefs of things. So I think talking to them and hearing what they think really opened up my mind to other things." Participants indicated that engaging in discourse with their peers helped them become more open-minded.

In addition, participants found value in revisiting their own viewpoints after considering others' perspectives, as Shawn's response illustrated: "I thought one of the biggest parts of ADL was just seeing so many different opinions and kind of deciding which ones to incorporate in your own opinions." Not only did participants acknowledge that disagreement could open their minds, but they also expressed that it could help them abandon, revise, or reinforce their own beliefs. For participants, engaging in dialogue with individuals with whom they disagreed helped them abandon inaccurate ideas, revise ones that were flawed, or reinforce those that they felt were already strong. Thus, findings indicated that by exchanging ideas with others and comparing new perspectives to their own, participants came to appreciate the value that disagreement could play in making their own beliefs more accurate.

Theme 4: Seeing Others as Multidimensional Individuals

Participants explained that their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers helped them see others as complex rather than through a single lens, and as individuals rather than as

members of cliques. Evident in the field notes, when prompted by trainers from the ADL, participants gave examples of characteristics one would not know about a person by looking at them, including their “fears,” “wellness” status, “home life,” “level of education,” and so on. Instead of judging others through first impressions or stereotypes, participants came to see others as layered individuals who should neither be judged by a preconceived notion nor by a group to which they identify. This concept was perhaps best illustrated by Sophie’s reflection on her experiences:

I really learned that people are complex and not everything is so black and white when it comes to those around you. There’s a lot of different dimensions to who people are. It's not just something that you can tell by, you know, looking at them from the outside.

In both interviews and focus groups, the notion that individuals are complex and layered came up again and again. Tim’s comment captured a sentiment shared by participants: “You learn that everyone is so much more than just the face you see in school every day.” Tim’s response, which is reminiscent of the idiom, “don’t judge a book by its cover,” illustrated participants’ awareness that their peers were more complex than they previously thought, that there were more aspects to who others were than could be assumed by appearances. Ellie’s recollection of an epiphany also captured the notion that participants began to see others as multidimensional:

I was like, Wow! There's so much more to a person than you see. Like you look at a person, you see an image, but that can be completely opposite of what's going on inside, like there's so much more to a person, so it just puts that in perspective.

Seeing others as complex and layered helped participants transcend stereotypes based upon appearances or groups to which their peers belonged. Prior to their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, participants “didn't know much about them [their peers] besides just the most obvious features like they do sports, or they're in the band or something like that,” as Josh explained; however, listening to and interacting with them “allowed me to just open my eyes and see that there's so much more complexity to each person in the school that we just, a lot of students tend to skip over or ignore because of what they've heard.” Participants' experiences helped them overcome preconceived notions about their peers in favor of a more comprehensive and accurate perception.

Mitigating Personal Biases and Stereotypes. In many cases, once they recognized others as multidimensional, participants mitigated personal biases and stereotypes by altering their thought patterns when interacting with peers. After all, participants recognized that some of the ideas they held about their peers were incomplete or flawed, and they took steps to avoid mischaracterizing another person or group based upon assumptions. Josh, for example, reflected upon how he overcame his preconceived, stereotypical ideas about certain groups of students such as those “who are in the theater programs or students that play football,” explaining that his experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer “allow me to just see past these ideas that I've heard around the school, that one group does this or the other can do that only, or they act a certain way, that their friends are a certain way.” Similarly, Jimmy explained that his experiences had “just helped me reflect on my actions and how I live my daily life, and trying not to make those stereotypes when you first see somebody, and really getting to know them before you guess anything about them.” Josh's and Jimmy's responses demonstrated how

participants first began seeing their peers as multidimensional individuals and then mitigated personal biases and stereotypes.

For participants, mitigating biases became a conscious effort, as Sarah's explanation exemplified: "Sometimes I just get that awareness level and I'm like...I really shouldn't be thinking that about this person or...this is what society wants me to think about this person, but you know it's not true at all." Participants' awareness of the pervasive nature of stereotypes initiated a process of reflection in which they recognized when they were judging a person through a single lens, or when their thinking was rooted in bias. Ariella's response demonstrated another example of how participants altered their thought patterns to mitigate biases and stereotypes:

I used to walk somewhere and look at someone and be like, oh they're this way (meaning I believed the stereotypes without even realizing it). Being in ADL has helped me refocus my mindset and be like, OK, they're not originally what I thought, I should look at the person and get to know them before I make that judgment right off the bat.

Seeing others as multidimensional individuals helped participants recognize and compensate for stereotypical thoughts.

Some participants even gave specific examples of bias mitigation in contexts outside Spruce High School. For example, Ariella detailed how she overcame a stereotype about Christians while touring a college:

I was touring some colleges and one of them was a Christian college. I'm not very religious. At first, I was kind of nervous because being not religious, I didn't feel like I fit in, but then I put that behind me and thought I shouldn't judge this whole

group just based off their stereotypes. (I feel it's important to specify Christians are stereotyped to "hate" or dislike the LGBTQ+ community, which I am a member of. That's a large reason that I was nervous to look at the school). I should just understand people for who they are individually and not just judge a whole group based off stereotypes.

Seeing others as multidimensional helped participants withhold judgment and keep an open mind, and they reminded themselves to get to know others for who they are as individuals.

Additionally, some participants detailed personal changes that resulted from the process of seeing others as multidimensional and mitigating personal biases. For example, Sophie contrasted her "former self" with who she had become:

I would say that freshman year, sophomore year, if I had met someone and they had said something I didn't quite agree with, or I had looked at them and made a few snap judgments. I maybe placed them in a box and you know, kind of labeled them as something, like they are this. And I feel like since then, in meeting new people, especially those who are different from me, I'm able to take a step back and just kind of try to understand who they are aside from any snap judgment that my former self might have made. It's the human thing to do is to just, you know, I see this, so I'm going to think this. You don't know the whole story.

Sophie then referred to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," to illustrate that she used to perceive others through a single story but no longer did (Adichie, 2009). Sophie's shift was indicative of how participants became

Careful not to judge others through stereotypes or with bias, but to see them as multidimensional individuals.

For participants, a critical part of their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers included reducing personal biases by withholding judgment and not assigning a single story to another person. Rather, they began seeing others as multidimensional individuals.

Theme 5: Shifting from Bystanders to Upstanders

Through their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, participants began shifting from bystanders to upstanders. The data showed that participants' experiences increased the likelihood that they would intervene as they acquired the confidence, skills, and will to stand up for others in the moment and to facilitate critical conversations. While the 2021 cohort explained that they would be more likely to intervene in the future, the 2019 cohort cited specific instances in which they stood up for others.

Data indicated that developing the confidence and skills to intervene proved to be critical factors that helped participants shift from bystanders to upstanders. Josh's reflection on how his experiences as a trainer affected him personally captured participants' newly developed confidence to stand up for others:

I think ADL, those three days so far have greatly increased my confidence...to stand up for others, or to speak out when I hear something that shouldn't be said, or that is incorrect or inaccurate. That is incredibly beneficial not only just for now but for the rest of my life. I think that alone has greatly helped me. And I think that this is going to change my behavior because it's just going to change how I go about my whole, my whole life at Spruce, whenever I'm in class or whatever. When I'm in bowling, for example, or in my club meetings, anything

like that. It just gives you this new mindset of, hey, I can really make this difference and I can help others make a difference too...

While 2021 cohort trainers like Josh had not yet had the opportunity to act upon their new roles as upstanders, they felt more confident and began to imagine specific situations in which they could try out their roles.

Other participants attributed their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers to an increased likelihood that they would intervene when another individual expressed a bias or stereotype, made an insensitive joke or remark, or acted in any other way that could harm someone. Ariella's description about her increase in confidence and comfort to intervene when a peer makes an insensitive or judgmental comment about another person captured a shift experienced by all participants: "I have gotten more confident and more comfortable...if I see a little judgment happening to the side...if I hear them making a comment I'll be like, that's not nice." Ariella's specific example of how she would intervene reflected participants' shift toward acting in the moment.

While some participants acknowledged that they eventually may have learned to speak out for people without their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, the overwhelming consensus was that participants' experiences gave them the confidence they needed to shift from bystanders to upstanders. Sarah's reflection illustrated this concept: "Maybe I would have been able to [stand up for people] without it as well...I think ADL definitely helped me just gain that other layer of confidence that I needed." As another example, Tim explained, "I'm also confident enough, and I built the confidence and the ability to step in and to say, okay that's too far [when someone makes an inappropriate joke]."

Overall, participants felt more confident to intervene in their roles as ADL Peer Trainers as a result of their experiences.

Participants also explicitly contrasted their level of confidence before becoming ADL Peer Trainers with how they felt after, and many of them abandoned introverted tendencies in favor of more extroverted behaviors required of upstanders. Tara illustrated this transformation:

I think before ADL training, I definitely did not have the composure or confidence to stand up for things that I knew were wrong. I was kind of reserved, especially when it came to conflicting opinions or controversial topics. Even though I might've had those opinions myself, I didn't project them. And then after ADL, I found that confidence to do that. So I think it really just has given me the skills I need to confront difficult situations that I didn't have before.

Participants became more outspoken when it came to standing up for the values they supported. Sophie's comment also exemplified the personal growth that resulted in participants' willingness to intervene:

I felt like freshman and sophomore year, before my training, I was a bit more timid of a person as it is, and I don't think I would have necessarily stepped in to say something, but having gone through the training and then getting a greater understanding of how words can affect people like that. Even if it's just supposed to be a joke, it's not right. And I really try my best not to be a bystander anymore, and I think by setting an example, I think other people around me will eventually try to do the same thing.

Both Tara and Sophie described a personal transformation from individuals who were “reserved” or “timid,” respectively, to ones who were more confident and willing to advocate for others as upstanders.

While all participants indicated that they would intervene as upstanders, so long as it was safe to do so, it is important to note that some indicated that they would have intervened in certain circumstances even before their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers. Hailey, for example, explained that prior to becoming a Peer Trainer, she would have intervened but only if she heard repetitive mean comments: “I think that like hearing mean comments or something like that, I feel like before it would have to be something that I hear repetitively. I probably wouldn't intervene just after someone said one thing.” After becoming a trainer, she felt more confident to intervene: “But now I think that I could just, if someone said something, I feel like I could just say, hey that wasn't cool, without thinking about it like I used to.” Prior to their experiences as trainers, participants would make excuses for the individual who made insensitive comments to justify remaining a bystander: “Before I'd be like, oh, maybe they didn't mean it, or maybe they're good friends or something like that.” But now they imagined themselves intervening without overthinking.

In addition to acquiring the confidence to intervene, participants articulated that they acquired the skills to shift from bystanders to upstanders. For example, explaining that he thought it was his job as an ADL Peer Trainer to “step in and address” inappropriate jokes that others make, Jimmy noted that he always had a desire to step in but did not have the skills to do so: “I think I always wanted to do it but never knew how to.” However, he articulated that after training he felt equipped to intervene: “And after

these trainings, I feel like it has prepared me enough to know what to do and how to do it.” Thus, participants’ experiences helped them acquire the skills to intervene as upstanders in reaction to inappropriate or insensitive comments made by others.

Becoming Comfortable with Critical Conversations. The shift from bystanders to upstanders involved not just reactive interventions, but more proactive approaches as well. In addition to intervening in the moment to challenge a comment rooted in bias, participants explained that they developed the confidence and skills to facilitate critical conversations. For example, during a role-play activity, one of the participants openly questioned the appropriateness of acting out a scenario in which a person was bullied for being Hispanic because no one in the group was Hispanic. The fact that the participant expressed this concern illustrated an increased comfort with facilitating critical conversations. As another example, Shawn said that one of the biggest skills he acquired as an ADL Peer Trainer “was actually just like being comfortable going to talk to other people about pretty intense issues for the most part.” Similarly, Tim’s personal reflection captured participants’ increased capability to raise awareness for various issues such as bias, bullying, stereotypes, and microaggressions:

I was also given a huge skill set that spans between presenting as in being able to present, have open conversation...being able to lead large group discussions that break barriers, but along with that I was also able to deal with different diversity, sexual orientations, a very broad group of people as well.

Acquiring the skills and confidence to facilitate critical conversations was important for participants’ sense of efficacy as upstanders. Participants developed the confidence and skills to facilitate workshops and engage their peers in difficult conversations, as

reflected in Kelly's explanation that she learned "really just how to talk to people about sensitive topics and things that people don't really want to talk about..." As other examples, Christy noted that she learned "some public speaking skills" related to "speaking to peers about touchy subjects," and Sarah described an increased capacity with "guiding conversations" and "handling these sensitive topics like race, like sexuality, different identities." Participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers helped them become more confident and skilled at facilitating critical conversations, solidifying their shift from bystanders to upstanders.

Theme 6: Prioritizing Respect to Challenge Bias

Data showed that participants implemented their responsibilities as ADL Peer Trainers by showing respect and nuance when challenging biases, a strategy that they perceived as more effective and less confrontational. According to participants, they were more likely to reach their goals by respecting, validating, and working to understand others' viewpoints rather than dismissing them. Tara's comment captured this theme when she stated, "I think that ADL's focus to educate rather than judge people for their biases or prejudices is something that will really stick with me." Although characterized as the ADL's approach, participants embraced the mantra and appropriated the strategy for their own use.

Participants showed patience and understanding in their roles as ADL Peer Trainers. Harleigh's emphasis on the importance of intervening in a way that does not make someone feel attacked or uncomfortable for their beliefs echoed the approach that participants took to challenge bias: "So now I know how to address that to hopefully make them not as uncomfortable and show that, oh no, I'm actually here to respect you

and help you.” Participants saw themselves as educators, not enforcers, as Kelly’s recollection of her experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer in high school reflected: “We talked a lot about stereotypes and racism, and talking about it in a way that’s like, we’re not mad at you, it’s not your fault that this is happening...we’re just here to help you become better people...” Participants indicated that respect and education served as effective tools to challenge biases.

In addition, participants recognized that intervening with respect would prevent others from getting defensive. Norah’s explanation captured how participants prioritized respect when confronting a stereotypical or judgmental comment:

When people say something that is really judgmental or stereotypical, I can now with ease be like *Why?* and question why they think that, or like not in an accusing way but tell them why that’s wrong. Not in a way that makes them feel bad but in a learning way. It’s not to make someone feel bad about themselves or get mad at you, but make them realize that what they’re saying isn’t right, or what they think isn’t right.

As exemplified by Norah’s explanation, participants felt that teaching someone about the effects of their words without making them feel guilty was an effective approach. As another example, Kelly’s discussion about why a respectful approach is more effective illustrated how participants showed patience and understanding, not judgement: “I feel like when you say, ‘Yo, that’s not right,’ people get defensive and they immediately close themselves off, and they’re like, ‘I’m not going to talk to you.’” Instead, as Kelly explained, “I feel you have to come at it from a more, I guess compassionate angle, because otherwise they’re going to shut down and you’re not gonna be able to have these

conversations in the first place.” In fact, Kelly gave a specific example of this strategy in action when she saw an anti-Semitic remark on somebody’s social media account: “I was like, I wasn't like attacking them, I was like, ‘Hey, why’d you say that?’ And then I heard what their reasoning was and then tried to help them unpack it...” Participants’ strategic and respectful approach helped others identify the origin and problematic nature of their beliefs in a non-threatening manner.

Participants explained that prioritizing respect helped to create a safe environment in which individuals felt comfortable engaging in dialogue, as Christy’s comment illustrated: “In order for people to share personal experiences or their opinions on things, you have to make it very clear that this is a place...that you can share your opinions without being judged.” Participants’ responses indicated that they thought it was important to bring problematic beliefs to the surface to subject those beliefs to scrutiny. Prioritizing respect to challenge bias promoted dialogue in which participants’ peers felt comfortable sharing their perspectives. As a final example, Hailey’s characterization illustrated that participants believe in the need to reassure their peers that they could improve and that they would not be judged: “But it's not like we're gonna judge them. Like, it's a safe space to reflect and think about how you can improve instead of harping on a negative.” According to participants, emphasizing respect created a sense of safety in which students could share ideas and perspectives without fear, bringing problematic beliefs to the surface and opening them to change.

Overall, participants described their roles in terms of educators and mentors rather than police, as Shawn’s comment reflected: “Showing them...what is acceptable, what's not acceptable, and kind of teaching them why and why not, without being

condescending or trying to get them in trouble...just being like a peer mentor...” Also supporting this notion were the adjectives that participants attributed to effective facilitators, including “empathetic,” “respectful,” “helpful,” “kind,” “understanding,” “caring,” and “supportive,” as recorded in the field notes. Prioritizing respect enlisted participants as positive role models in the school, and according to them, it increased their effectiveness as Peer Trainers.

Theme 7: Developing an Interest in Social Justice Beyond Spruce High School

Through their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, many participants developed an interest in social justice that extended beyond their roles as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School. Participants’ interest manifested in two ways. First, participants sought or planned to seek additional information about, and opportunities related to, social justice issues. Second, they began engaging in social justice activism beyond what their roles as ADL Peer Trainers required.

Participants indicated that their interest in social justice led them to seek additional knowledge about social justice issues. For example, Tara explained that she utilized social media to follow “a lot of social justice type things, like I follow a couple accounts that give specific scenarios where someone might have been put at a disadvantage because of their race or gender or sexuality.” In response to whether she would have developed the same interest in social justice if she had not become an ADL Peer Trainer, Tara admitted, “I think I would’ve been just as passionate about the things I am today, but I don’t know if I would be as explicit and open about it.” Participants’ responses indicated a genuine interest in social justice that in some cases led to planned action beyond their roles in their high school. Although an engineering major, Brelynn

developed an interest in taking courses related to social justice: “And even now, I'm more interested in taking classes that might dabble in, you know, I have to take elective classes outside of engineering, so maybe now I'll take more of a social justice relevant class.”

Kyle's response captured another example: “Now I really like doing this and know that I want to do something like this in the future, whether it's for a career or a side thing.”

Participants' responses indicated that their interest in social justice extended beyond their duties as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School as they explored or planned to explore social justice issues in their lives.

Data also showed that some participants' interest in social justice resulted in activism outside their school. While the ADL Peer Training program required participants to serve as positive role models at Spruce High School, it did not require them to act in a broader capacity. Illustrating how participants' interest in social justice led to activism beyond their roles as ADL Peer Trainers, Kelly told me that in addition to volunteering at soup kitchens to give back to the community, “especially in Camden [New Jersey] and stuff where these people aren't as fortunate as us,” she has “gone to some protests...and it's something I want to keep doing, especially when I get a job and I'm an adult and have more impact in the world.” Participants linked their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers with their interest in social justice activism outside Spruce High School, as reflected in Kelly's description of who she was two or three years ago and how she was different today:

I just know like me from two, three years ago wouldn't be volunteering, wouldn't be going to protests and wouldn't be having these difficult conversations that need

to be had. I would have just shied away, I would have sat in the background, and now I'm involving myself.

Responding to whether she would have done those things if she had not become an ADL Peer Trainer, she noted, "I don't think I would have. Again, it would be a belief like, Oh, maybe one day it would be nice to go and help somebody out..." Because of their experiences, participants developed an interest in social justice that inspired them to act beyond Spruce High School, as Kelly's response reflected:

I put in more work to help people and I want to see a change in the world, so I'm trying to help be that change in the world, instead of just sitting back and saying, oh, somebody else will do it for me.

Participants also noted that being able to influence others to have an open mind was a concept they planned to spread beyond their school, as Tim explained:

I want to when I have kids be able to show them that there is no reason why you shouldn't communicate with someone, or should have any stereotypes, because everyone is the same deep down. We all come from different backgrounds and stuff, but there's no reason for hatred.

Participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inspired an interest in social justice that manifested in the form of them seeking educational opportunities and spreading their passion for social justice beyond their roles at Spruce High School

Theme 8: Developing a Positive Self-Image

The eighth and final theme reflected participants' development of a positive self-image related to their identities and beliefs. To illustrate this concept, I presented three

examples of participants whose experiences helped them embrace who they were and what they believed.

Participants' roles as ADL Peer Trainers promoted personal reflection about their identities. As an example, Tim's experiences helped him embrace his identity as biracial in the context of a predominately White school. Describing how his experiences affected him personally, Tim contrasted his childhood with that of his peers: "My childhood wasn't the same as everyone else's because I grew up without, you know, my dad didn't watch the football that everyone else watched every Sunday." Tim then reflected upon a negative experience in middle school: "My 8th grade year I was facing bullying issues. I wasn't comfortable with myself, and people were making fun of me, and I hated it." In sharp contrast to his previous perception of himself as *different* and his negative self-image from middle school, Tim spoke with enthusiasm about both his identity and his role as a Peer Trainer. In fact, Tim attributed his experiences as a Peer Trainer with his ability to fully appreciate and embrace his identity as half Indian American:

I had always thought [being half Indian American] was awesome, but it, there were times where it was like, it was almost like, ok this is just different, and this kind of stinks because it is different. But I think ADL showed me that any time I thought negatively in the aspect of it being different, ADL really turned it all into a positive, how amazing it is to come from a different background like this.

Growing up, in middle school they try to tell you that, but then you look around your classroom and no one else is like you, everyone is different. Everyone is different, and you're the only one that's, you know, you grow up, here at least, I grew up the only one with Indian culture. There were two or three of us, and then

ADL comes along and boosts the idea that this is awesome, and you should appreciate it. And I guess it really boosted that for me.

Tim's experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer changed his perception of his biracial identity, and he felt proud of this aspect of his identity.

Furthermore, capturing a general sentiment shared by participants, Tim described his experiences as a Peer Trainer as both empowering and exciting, which strengthened his self-image:

The fact that now I was given an opportunity to make change in such an important area, and even if my change wasn't great, even if it didn't change the whole field for the whole world, but changing two kids' perspectives in a classroom on biases and stereotypes, that was huge. I think that fact, the fact that I was given the power and the chance to make that change, that was purely exciting.

Through his experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer, Tim felt that his identity was validated, and he expressed pride for the role he played at Spruce High School.

Crystal's journey as an ADL Peer Trainer served as another example of how participants developed a positive self-image. Reflecting on how she would use what she learned as an ADL Peer Trainer in the future, Crystal told me, "It changes your character." Clarifying, she explained that her experiences changed how she sees herself and others, and that the changes were positive:

You're just developing more as a person. As you're going through high school, you're learning more about who you are and how to treat other people, so because I've experienced ADL, that's played a role in how I see myself and how I see others. I don't think I can take that little chunk out.

Noted by Crystal, participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers had become part of who they were. In fact, Crystal initially hesitated to become an ADL Peer Trainer: "I wasn't sure how the ADL would handle my different beliefs. I didn't know if my different beliefs would be accepted because they do contradict other people's beliefs." As a Christian whose personal values were rooted in the Bible, Crystal worried that some of her beliefs would not be understood by others.

However, Crystal noted that her fears were alleviated by her experiences: "I felt very welcomed in that environment and safe to share what I believed, and hear what other people had to say. I also felt very supported by the teachers." The safe, comfortable, and affirming environment described by Crystal helped participants develop a positive self-image. As Crystal's explanation exemplified, participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers helped them to articulate their personal beliefs more clearly and confidently to others: "I think before ADL Training, I had a general idea of what I believed personally, but I wasn't able to articulate that in a way that was understandable to other people." Crystal became more comfortable with who she was, and her comments captured how participants developed a positive self-image by embracing and conveying their beliefs in a respectful manner:

I think, like I said before, it's helped me to be more comfortable with who I am, and communicating with other people, understanding who they are as a person and being able to respect our differences where we can still talk about common ground, and talk about the areas where we strongly disagree, and still be able to be friends and have those conversations.

Participants' development of a positive self-image not only helped them understand perspectives that were different from their own, but it gave them the confidence to articulate their own beliefs in a way that others could understand.

Norah's personal growth reflected a third and final example of how participants developed a positive self-image. Overall, participants spoke with pride and enthusiasm about their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, a concept captured by Norah's personal reflection: "I love who I am now. It helped me be a better person, and I love that that happened." Norah's experiences helped her realize the type of person she wanted to be. Before becoming an ADL Peer Trainer, Norah would often judge others for what they wore or what they posted online, possibly due to "jealousy in a sense, where I wish I could post whatever I want and wear whatever I want and not care what people would say about me." However, she described feeling liberated after learning not to judge others: "Being able to let people live their own lives and express themselves however they wanted to, helped me become a better person, and it makes life better, not being negative towards others." Norah said that she was "more open-minded" and more likely to think "good for you, express yourself" when others wore clothes or posted photos that she previously would have judged. As a result, Norah became "more care-free in a good way," explaining that "it's a great way to live. It makes life happier, better, easier." Norah's demeanor and responses indicated that she developed a positive self-image, and she expressed great pride for the role she played as a Peer Trainer: "I guess it makes you feel complete in a sense where you have that sense of, like I helped someone out. Even if it's just one person or little things, just to know you helped make someone's life better."

The process of becoming Peer Trainers helped participants develop a positive self-image, and they felt complete with opportunity to pay it forward.

In sum, participants felt positive about their roles as ADL Peer Trainers as they reflected on the knowledge they acquired and the responsibilities they were given to help foster an inclusive school environment. Participants' experiences as Peer Trainers gave them a sense of purpose, a sense of pride, and they articulated that their experiences as Peer Trainers became part of their identities as students at Spruce High School.

Confronting Resistance. The fact that participants developed a positive self-image as ADL Peer Trainers helped them overcome resistance from some of their peers. A few participants acknowledged that not all their peers were receptive to engaging in anti-bias and diversity training. For example, Brelynn explained that “some students just didn't think that it was something that needed to be taught...like they thought it was us kind of forcing an opinion [on them]...” Some participants also indicated that a small number of their peers would occasionally joke about the ADL Peer Training, or that they were “just overall not taking it seriously,” as Christy explained. While Christy attributed some of the resistance to “people being raised where they think disrespecting others is okay...,” Hailey acknowledged the difficulty of reflecting upon one's biases: “We're asking the kids to do something hard. It's not easy to reflect on the way that you think about other people or the way you treat other people...” However, participants overcame occasional challenges by taking pride in the importance of their work, a concept captured by Denise: “There's always going to be those few kids who aren't going to take it seriously and are going to make jokes about it...[but] it's still important for them to be taught.”

Participants' development of a positive self-image related to their roles also helped them overcome occasional negative attention they received. For example, Crystal explained that sometimes peers would make comments such as, "Oh, you're an ADL Peer Trainer," in a sarcastic tone. However, participants indicated that their sense of pride about their roles helped them overcome any mockery, as captured by Ariella's explanation: "I get that [rewarding] feeling...so I kind of just let it roll off my back." While participants acknowledged some resistance from their peers, they leveraged both their personal pride as ADL Peer Trainers and the importance of their work to overcome any challenges they faced.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented eight themes reflecting participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School: "shifting from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective," "employing empathy," "finding value in disagreement," "seeing others as multidimensional individuals," "shifting from bystander to upstander," "prioritizing respect to challenge bias," "developing an interest in social justice beyond Spruce High School," and "developing a positive self-image." In the next chapter, I connected the findings to this study's research questions, to the theoretical framework, and to literature while also exploring implications for policy, practice, and research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the experiences of students who were trained by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as Peer Trainers at Spruce High School, a predominately White, suburban high school in New Jersey. Research questions included: 1.) In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning? 2.) In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies? and 3.) In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School? To recruit participants, I used criterion sampling, inviting all students who were part of the 2019 or 2021 cohort of ADL Peer Trainers in their high school to engage in focus groups and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The study included 22 total participants, including 12 from the 2019 cohort and 10 from the 2021 cohort. Participants' grade levels ranged from those in their second year of high school, to those in their first year of college. Data collection included focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and field notes taken during the three days in which the 2021 cohort was trained by the ADL.

An analysis of the data yielded eight themes related to participants' experiences: "Shifting from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective," "employing empathy," "finding value in disagreement," "seeing others as multidimensional individuals," "shifting from bystander to upstander," "prioritizing respect to challenge bias," "developing an interest in social justice beyond Spruce High School," and "developing a positive self-image."

In the next section, I answered each research question and connected the findings to the conceptual framework and the literature. Then, I discussed implications for policy, practice, leadership, and research. Finally, I concluded the chapter with recommendations.

Transformative Learning and Participants' Experiences as ADL Peer Trainers

The first research question asked, "In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?" Each of the eight themes I identified reflected some degree of transformed perspective, whether a participant shifted from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective, began employing empathy, found value in disagreement, began seeing others as multidimensional individuals, shifted from bystander to upstander, developed an interest in social justice beyond Spruce High School, or developed a positive self-image. Given the explicit connection that Mezirow (2003) made between transformative learning and perspective transformation related to "cultural bias" and "stereotyped attitudes and practices" (p. 59), it is not surprising that participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers in a predominately White context reflected at least the beginning of perspective transformation.

In the next section, I used Cranton's framework to discuss the connections between participants' experiences and each phase of transformative learning (Cranton, 2002): Experiencing an activating event, articulating assumptions, engaging in critical self-reflection, being open to alternative views, engaging in discourse, revising assumptions, and acting.

Activating Event

Cranton (2002) noted that an activating event “typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read” (p. 66). Participants’ responses suggest that their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers served as an activating event for transformative learning as they recognized that their perspectives, which were informed by the homogeneous environment in which they were raised, were in many cases limited. Although Mezirow (2009) described this phase as a “disorienting dilemma” (p. 94) and King (2009) an “upheaval” (p. 5), the data indicated that participants experienced more of an enlightenment in line with Cranton’s (2002) and Nohl’s (2015) characterizations. More specifically, for both cohorts of Peer Trainers, findings suggest that participants’ engagement in three days of ADL Peer Training initiated the process of transformative learning. While the 2019 cohort of ADL Peer Trainers had more time and experiences upon which to reflect, even the 2021 cohort indicated at least the beginning of perspective transformation.

Articulating Assumptions

Noted by Cranton (2002), recognizing assumptions is a necessary step for transformative learning to occur. This study’s findings suggest that many participants were aware of the assumptions they previously held, paving the way for perspective transformation. For example, several explained that they assumed others’ experiences at Spruce High School were similar to their own, or that because they or their friends never encountered microaggressions, neither did others. Additionally, in line with Tatum’s (1997) assertion that the perceptions we have of individuals who are different from

ourselves are often inaccurate, several participants articulated assumptions about others that were based upon preconceived ideas about groups to which their peers belonged. As Cranton (2002) noted, “our assumptions are deeply embedded in our childhood, community, and culture” (p. 67), a concept that participants recognized in descriptions of their local context. Bringing such assumptions to the surface opened them to revision.

Critical Self-Reflection

Cranton (2002) explained that during critical self-reflection, individuals reconsider their beliefs based upon new information or experiences. In this case, many participants recognized that the knowledge and experiences they had prior to becoming ADL Peer Trainers were limited because of the environment in which they were raised, and they attributed their experiences as Peer Trainers to an increase in awareness of the limitations of their perspectives. In fact, the consensus was that the new information they acquired as ADL Peer Trainers challenged the information they previously held, especially related to the experiences of minoritized or marginalized individuals and groups. Thus, participants’ experiences promoted critical reflection about personal biases, which challenged stereotypes and misconceptions they held about different others (Hjerm et al., 2018).

Participants’ responses supported King’s (2009) description of the metacognitive process that could result in transformative learning: “If the [new] information does not readily fit, they may begin to question their values, beliefs, and assumptions to determine what is out of place” (p. 7). In this case, participants’ perceptions of others in many cases contradicted their assumptions, resulting in critical reflection. Although King’s summary described adult learning, participants’ responses suggest that critical self-reflection

applies to adolescents as well, as participants articulated that the beliefs and assumptions about others were based upon narrow, self-centered perspectives.

Open to Alternative Views

Participants' responses suggested an openness to alternative views as they acknowledged that their own perspectives were exclusive and incomplete. In fact, the findings showed that they began putting themselves in others' shoes, which in turn helped them see other perspectives. The process of opening current beliefs, feelings, or attitudes to new information is a critical part of the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1979). As evidence of an openness to alternative views, participants began to see the value of disagreement, articulating the benefits of hearing alternative perspectives and comparing them with their own.

Engaging in Discourse

Cranton (2002) described this phase as "engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus" (p. 66). Through their experiences as Peer Trainers, participants explored topics related to social justice and developed an appreciation for the value of disagreement in general. In fact, the findings indicated that participants listened to and learned about the experiences of their peers, and they compared new ideas to the ones they previously held. Embracing disagreement represented a shift in participants' epistemic habits of mind as they identified discourse as a valuable source of knowledge. This notion mirrors the shift in habits of mind described by Robinson's and Levac's (2018) study of college students' transformative experiences in a civic engagement course focusing on privilege and oppression.

Revising Assumptions

The findings showed that participants revised some of the limited perspectives that they previously held. More specifically, participants shifted from a narrow, exclusive perspective to a broad, more inclusive one as they came to see others as multidimensional individuals and not through a single or stereotypical lens. Furthermore, many participants recognized the biases they held about others and took steps to mitigate them. Participants acknowledged that they previously were unaware of the extent to which marginalized groups encountered biases and microaggressions. Revising assumptions related to the experiences of diverse others may help to curtail biased attitudes that can lead to discrimination and bullying and, in many cases, achievement gaps (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Furthermore, revising assumptions can help to foster a more inclusive school environment (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019).

However, in discussing their personal biases, participants spoke about marginalized groups in general terms rather than with specificity. It is certainly possible that I did not ask enough probing questions to prevent causing participants any discomfort. Another explanation is that participants did not feel comfortable sharing personal biases they previously held about specific marginalized groups, especially with an adult in their school. A third explanation is that participants were in the early stages of perspective transformation related to social justice and lacked the expertise to discuss the experiences of marginalized groups in detail.

Acting

Cranton (2002) explained the final phase of transformative learning as “acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed

assumptions or perspectives” (p. 66). The findings showed that participants did act, behave, and think in line with some degree of transformed perspectives. For example, some began employing empathy through their language, more carefully selecting their words before speaking. Others shifted from a bystander to an upstander, becoming more comfortable intervening to confront a joke or behavior that was rooted in bias. Still others began exploring social justice on their own or giving back to their community through volunteerism. The connection between analysis and action reflects Bell’s (2016) characterization of social justice education.

Borrowing the question raised by Roinson and Levac (2018), one of the questions I asked in Chapter 2 was whether the action phase of transformative learning could include thinking differently, or did it require altered behavior? While I argued that changes in thinking would qualify, this study’s findings showed evidence of both, and participants directly attributed the changes they experienced to their roles as ADL Peer Trainers. For example, many participants noted that they engaged in reflection to reconsider their biased or stereotypical thoughts, which in some cases resulted in behavioral changes that ranged from intervening as an upstander, avoiding the telling of an inappropriate joke, or even attending a protest or advocating social justice causes on social media. Furthermore, the findings supported Cranton’s and Hoggan’s (2012) assertion that evidence of transformative learning could include “someone who previously showed little tolerance for diversity...[who] now demonstrates inclusive behavior.” In this case, while no participants admitted an intolerance for diversity, they did acknowledge a lack of exposure and limited knowledge that was transformed because of their experiences.

Finally, findings supported Cranton's (2002) assertion that educators could help students act on transformed perspectives by providing opportunities for students to practice and talk about their new learning. Having opportunities to critically self-reflect and engage in dialogue with their peers helped participants shift from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective, as well as develop the confidence and capacity to intervene as upstanders.

Experiencing Perspective Transformation

Mezirow (1996) asserted that transformative learning takes place when an individual realizes how current assumptions are incomplete or limited by past experiences, and they experience a change in perspective. In this case, participants' experiences showed evidence of perspective transformation similar to the examples of transformation provided by King (2009): "I see things really differently now"; "I am much more open-minded to views other than mine"; and "I have more self-confidence than I ever dreamed possible" (p. 4). Participants broadened their perspectives as they realized the limits of their environment and embraced diversity and new ideas, began to see their peers as multidimensional, became aware of their privilege in contrast to the experiences of diverse others, acquired confidence and the capability to make a difference in their school and community, and in some cases, developed an interest in social justice and transformed how they viewed themselves.

Furthermore, the findings illustrated that adolescents could experience transformative learning, joining the likes of Walker and Molnar (2013), Illeris (2014), Harrell-Levy et al. (2016), and Meerts-Brandtsma and Sibthorp (2021), and suggesting that one's adolescence could be an asset if the goal is to teach for transformation. The

findings gave credence to Mezirow's (2009) assertion that transformative learning could challenge an individual's "predisposition" (p. 93) to judge as inferior those outside one's group, which he described as ethnocentrism. After all, participants shifted from a narrow, self-centered perspective to an inclusive, other-centered one. As participants began putting themselves in others' shoes and opening their eyes to inequality and privilege, they became more empathetic to the experiences of minoritized and marginalized individuals and groups, and they demonstrated more inclusive thoughts and behaviors.

However, it is necessary to qualify the degree to which participants experienced perspective transformation related to the development of an orientation toward social justice. The fact that participants experienced some degree of perspective transformation is not meant to imply that their work as social justice allies is complete. Rather, participants may be in the early stages of perspective transformation as social justice allies, which supports both Bell's (2016) characterization of social justice education as a process and the agreement among most scholars that stages of transformative learning are fluid (Cranton, 2002). While findings show evidence of perspective transformation, it may be best to view participants' journeys as social justice allies as a cycle through which they can continually revisit their beliefs throughout their lives. This study's findings suggest that 2019 cohort participants' experiences were still relevant to their lives two years after engaging in the initial three days of ADL Peer Training; however, the duration of and degree to which participants' perspective transformation would endure is unknown.

ADL Peer Trainers Empowered as Social Justice Allies

The second research question asked, “In what ways do Spruce High School students’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies?” The study defined empowerment through Russell et al.’s (2009) three dimensions: “Having and using knowledge” (p. 896); “feeling good about oneself, having a voice, and having control or agency” (p. 897); and relationship empowerment as members of a group with a common goal to effect change. Students’ experiences reflected two of the three dimensions of empowerment as participants were enlisted as social justice allies, which this study defined as someone who “speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying” (ADL, 2019, p.229), in their school.

Having and Using Knowledge

First, participants acquired knowledge that improved their efficacies as ADL Peer Trainers, reflecting both what Beelmann and Lutterbach (2020) called knowledge-based and skill-based interventions. Findings suggest that prior to their experiences, participants had limited exposure to diversity and diverse perspectives; however, their experiences as Peer Trainers marked a shift from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective, increasing their awareness of and empathy for individuals and groups who are marginalized. In fact, just as participants in Russell et al.’s (2007) study described becoming empowered by “understanding and respecting people whose opinions differ from one’s own” (p. 897), this study’s findings indicate that participants found value in hearing others’ perspectives because it provided them an opportunity to reflect upon their own views and decide whether to revise them.

Participants were empowered not simply by acquiring knowledge about different others, but by developing the skills and confidence to confront privilege in their school. As a result, they shifted from passive learners to individuals who could help foster the type of belonging that supports the “inherent dignity of each person” (Cobb & Krownapple, 2010). Additionally, participants felt more culturally competent as they learned about the experiences of diverse others in ways that prepared them both for their roles as ADL Peer Trainers and for their roles as citizens in a diverse society. Further, participants developed the confidence and skills to intervene when they saw an injustice, and to engage others in critical conversations. Thus, participants were empowered with knowledge and given the opportunity to use it to create a more inclusive school environment. The findings parallel Russell et al.’s (2007) study in which participants in Gay-Straight Alliances acquired the knowledge to confront heterosexism and homophobia, and to improve school climate.

Feeling Proud and Having a Voice

Second, the findings showed that participants were proud of their roles as ADL Peer Trainers, and they felt that they made a difference, or in the case of the 2021 cohort, would have the opportunity to make a difference, in their school. Many participants acquired a sense of agency by increasing their level of confidence as upstanders who could intervene to challenge biases and facilitate workshops for their peers. This sentiment parallels the psychological habits of mind in which participants in Robinson and Levac’s (2018) study came to see themselves as global citizens who could make a difference as individuals. However, unlike Robinson’s and Levac’s (2018) findings,

which found no evidence of students shifting toward action, findings of this study indicate at least some degree of a shift toward action.

Overall, participants felt more confident and capable as social justice allies, and several of them developed a positive self-image as they embraced who they were and felt a sense of satisfaction. The findings support Russell et al.'s (2009) second dimension of empowerment in which one student in GSA explained empowerment as "having the ability to feel good about who you are and what you do..." (p. 897). For Peer Trainers at Spruce High School, having a sense of pride in their roles both improved their self-image and helped them confront resistance from a few of their peers. Finally, just as personal empowerment led to empathy for others in the Russell et al.'s (2009) study, so too did participants in this study begin employing empathy through their thoughts and language, suggesting that empowering adolescents as social justice allies in their school may foster empathy and improve school climate.

Being a Member of a Group with a Common Goal

Finally, in Russell et al. (2009)'s study, students in Gay-Straight Alliances became empowered through group membership and by empowering others. Some participants in this study indicated that they felt empowered as members of a group who served as role-models for their peers, and some emphasized the bonds they had created with other peers in their cohort, which they attributed to engaging in dialogue in an environment that felt safe and prioritized respect. However, this study's findings neither corroborate nor challenge Russell et al.'s (2009) findings relative to the third component of youth empowerment.

Empowering Students as Social Justice Allies

Levin (2000) noted that students' voices are often left out of educational reform; however, in this case students were empowered to create a more inclusive school environment. Taken together, the findings reinforced Bell's (2016) characterization of social justice education, which "aims...to help participants develop a sense of agency and commitment, as well as skills and tools...to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities of which they are a part" (p. 4). Participants acknowledged that their perspectives were exclusive, and in many cases, they opened their eyes to the experiences of diverse others and to their own privilege. As a result, they helped to create a more inclusive environment as they began employing empathy, came to see others as multidimensional individuals, and shifted from bystanders to upstanders. The findings support Russell et al.'s (2009) characterization of youth empowerment: "Adolescence is an important developmental period for individual engagement in community and social concerns; the notion of empowerment suggests that young people discover their capacity to become agents of change in issues and causes that they care about" (p. 900). Thus, educational leaders who fail to enlist students as social justice allies will have missed an opportunity to leverage students' voices and advocacy for more inclusive and equitable schools and communities.

Furthermore, the findings were reminiscent of Freire's (1970) *conscientization*, initially applied to oppressed populations, in which individuals develop an awareness of the sociocultural forces that shape their lives and then are empowered to transform their realities through action. In this case, participants became aware of how their perspectives were limited by the environment in which they were raised, and through their experiences

as ADL Peer Trainers they were empowered with both the knowledge and capacity to create change in themselves and in their school. Similarly, the findings suggest that participants acquired “emancipatory knowledge,” which Habermas (1971) and then Cranton and Hoggan (2012) described as the type of learning that takes place when individuals who are oppressed challenge the oppression. Although some readers may question the application of *conscientization* (Freire, 1970) and “emancipatory knowledge” (Habermas, 1971) to participants, many of whom were White and therefore privileged, it is important to note that the connection I made is not to minimize the empowerment that marginalized individuals and groups may experience, but to emphasize the potential for privileged allies to recognize how their perspectives are limited by their environment and to transform both their own perspectives and the social context in which they live. Thus, empowering students with privilege as social justice allies may enlist those students as partners who can help foster an inclusive environment. Further, one participant, Tim, detailed how his experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer helped him embrace his biracial identity and feel empowered to help others achieve the same sense of fulfillment that he did. The findings suggest that participants’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers may help mitigate any marginalization that they might feel as minorities, preventing potential adverse effects on their self-image and achievement (Adams & Zuniga, 2016; Steele, 1999).

Informing Social Justice Education

The third research question asked, “In what ways can students’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?” Participants’

experiences underscored the importance of continuing and perhaps building upon the social justice education program that currently exists at Spruce High School.

First, the fact that participants' experiences reflected some degree of perspective transformation suggests that an effective approach to social justice education is to design programs that teach for transformation, such as those utilizing the strategies advocated by Cranton (2002). Given the fact that lack of contact with diverse others can contribute to biased and prejudicial attitudes (McKown, 2005), combined with the influence of environmental and social factors on prejudice development (Adams & Zuniga, 2016; McKown, 2005; Mezirow, 1991), it is critical for educators to provide opportunities for students to reflect upon the origins of their assumptions and values. Doing so may help students identify limitations or gaps in their perspectives, paving the way for perspective transformation. Further, the findings corroborate Harrell-Levy et al.'s (2016) assertion that combining social justice education with transformative learning promotes the type of critical reflection that can expose students to various "-isms" and inequalities that exist within society. In this case, participants recognized how their environment limited their world views, and through critical reflection and engaging in discourse with others, they broadened their perspectives. Thus, integrating teaching strategies to promote critical self-reflection, teach students about diversity, and encourage discourse not just among ADL Peer Trainers, but among all students at Spruce High School, may strengthen social justice education more generally in the school.

Second, the findings suggest that a critical component of social justice education is to prioritize respect to challenge bias. Participants' responses indicated that they were more effective as ADL Peer Trainers because they showed empathy, patience, and

nuance when a peer made a comment or acted in a way that was rooted in bias. Rather than reacting aggressively and missing an opportunity to educate, participants attempted to help their peers reflect upon their biases. Of course, most of the examples they provided did not include slurs that might justify a more aggressive response.

Nevertheless, emphasizing respect during social justice education may help educators and Peer Trainers convey anti-bias content more effectively, which may improve intergroup relations (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020) and youth outcomes (Grapin et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the respectful approach that participants took helped them overcome resistance they faced from some of their peers.

Third, participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reinforced the notion that social justice education is an ongoing process, a concept discussed by Bell (2016). Findings suggested that participants' experiences as Peer Trainers represented only the beginning of a shift toward becoming what Westheimer and Kahne (2003) referred to as justice-oriented citizens. Many participants from the 2019 cohort of ADL Peer Trainers, who had two years following their training to facilitate workshops for their peers and reflect upon the training, articulated an interest in social justice that resulted in action. Furthermore, they discussed plans for future actions related to social justice, such as attending more protests, taking a course related to social justice, or passing on similar values to their children. Participants from the 2021 cohort, however, were just beginning their journeys and were high school sophomores and juniors; as a result, they did not project their plans as far into the future. In addition, while participants acknowledged that certain individuals and groups faced challenges at Spruce High School, their interview and focus group responses lacked specificity about the ways in which marginalized

individuals experience racism, homophobia, and other “-isms” in their school.

Participants’ use of generalities suggested that they have room for growth as justice-oriented citizens.

Fourth, although I suggested in Chapter 2 that contact interventions, which are effective as anti-prejudice interventions (Beelman & Lutterbach, 2020), were not the best match for predominately White, suburban schools, the findings indicate that even in homogeneous contexts, some degree of contact interventions were possible. In this case, participants broadened their perspectives through contact with their peers from different social circles, and they came to see their peers as multidimensional individuals rather than through a single lens. These findings support Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis as well as other studies that show positive effects of contact interventions on prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020). Even in a school that lacks a great deal of visible diversity, strategically grouping together students with diverse experiences and backgrounds may foster more inclusive perspectives, increase empathy, and mitigate personal biases and stereotypes. Further, findings suggest that knowledge-based and skill-based interventions could help participants develop the confidence and capacity to serve as upstanders against biases in their high school. While evidence on the effectiveness of knowledge-based interventions is mixed (Stephan et al., 2004; Lai et al., 2014; Bezrukova et al., 2016), this study’s findings suggest that participants’ acquisition and application of knowledge empowered them as social justice allies in their school. Furthermore, Beelman and Lutterbach’s (2020) meta-analysis of 81 studies concluded that skill-based programs, or building individual capacities, showed “high potentials” (p. 18) for promoting intergroup harmony. Thus, perhaps an ideal

approach to prejudice reduction is a holistic one that combines contact, knowledge, and skill-based interventions.

Fifth, the findings supported several aspects of Paluck's (2010) study on the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*. In particular, some participants in this study indicated an awareness of social inequities, expressed that it was important to intervene to prevent biases or bullying, and described an increase in confidence and capacity to facilitate critical conversations. Although Paluck's (2010) findings did not show any statistically significant behavioral changes related to participants' willingness to sign the gay rights petition, this study's findings suggest that participants would be willing to intervene as upstanders for any marginalized group. However, while Paluck's (2010) design included treatment and control groups, this study examined the experiences of ADL Peer Trainers at a single high school. Overall, though, this study's findings corroborated Paluck's (2010) conclusion that the ADL Peer Training program is a promising anti-bias program.

Sixth, participants were enlisted as partners to help create an inclusive environment, and their shift from an exclusive to a more inclusive perspective, including putting themselves in others' shoes and increasing their awareness of inequality and privilege, established a foundation for inclusivity at Spruce High School. Furthermore, participants' shift from bystanders to upstanders, their more comprehensive perceptions of others, and their demonstration of empathy, suggested that they could help create the type of inclusion that Cobb and Krownapple (2019) argued schools should prioritize: "Engagement within a community where the equal worth and inherent dignity of each person is honored" (p. 33). Thus, ADL Peer Trainers played a role in fostering an

environment that is based upon inclusion rather than integration (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). Key components of social justice education at Spruce High School, then, should include bias mitigation and empathy building.

Finally, participants indicated that at least some students at Spruce High School expressed resistance to diversity and anti-bias training. As a result, educators and student trainers in any context might prepare to confront resistance when implementing social justice education programs. In this case, some of the peers of ADL Peer Trainers did not understand why the training was necessary, possibly because they were not aware of the experiences of marginalized individuals and groups in a context that lacked visible diversity. However, a great deal can be learned from how participants in this study confronted resistance—by leveraging both their pride as ADL Peer Trainers and their understanding of the importance of their work.

Implications

The themes that emerged from an analysis of participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers suggest that a program such as the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program* could play an important role in promoting social justice at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. Participants' positive and transformative experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School have important implications for policy, leadership, practice, and research.

Policy

While state laws that require education about the contributions and experiences of diverse others, such as those that currently exist in New Jersey, represent an important step for creating more inclusive curricula, curricular changes alone are not enough to

create school environments built upon a culture of inclusion. The findings of this study suggest that empowering high school students as social justice allies in predominately White contexts could help create change that starts at the individual level and extends to others. Thus, policymakers might consider not just promoting diversity through curricular changes, but also incentivizing the adoption of programs and best practices for transforming individual perspectives to make them more inclusive, open to change, and empathetic.

Given this study's findings, especially the connection between participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers and transformative learning resulting in some degree of perspective transformation and action, policymakers might offer incentives and financial support for school districts, especially in predominately White settings, to implement social justice education programs that teach for transformation and empower students as social justice allies. One avenue through which funding could be allocated is through anti-bias grants for which school districts can apply. Grants could be awarded based upon criteria such as demonstrated need as well as plans for implementation and evaluation.

To encourage the adoption of programs and best practices related to social justice education, policymakers also could consider supporting school district partnerships with organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and/or universities. These types of partnerships can help build individual and system-wide capacities to educate students about biases and microaggressions, foster discourse, promote critical self-reflection, and prioritize respect.

Leadership and Practice

In the first course that I took as a doctoral student, I wrote that I wanted to become a transformational and ultimately transformative leader. In fact, in an essay, I discussed the achievement gap that existed at Spruce High School between students who were socioeconomically disadvantaged and those who were not, noting that to address the gap, “the entire organization must reconsider its current beliefs and practices” (Knecht, 2018, p. 6). As a transformative leader, I too must engage in the type of critical self-reflection that students do in their roles as ADL Peer Trainers. And so should other educators at Spruce High School. Prieto’s (2009) assertion that individuals must come to terms with their personal biases to acknowledge their own privileges applies to educators as well as students. Educators who engage in critical self-reflection about social justice issues may join students in seeing themselves as agents of change (Brown, 2004). Only then will they be prepared to create and embrace transformative learning opportunities that result in personal growth for students and system-wide change toward social justice.

In addition, given this study’s findings that participants’ experiences as ADL Peer Trainers resulted in some degree of transformative learning related to social justice, educators at Spruce High School should consider embedding practices to teach for transformation in their lessons. Teaching students about biases, microaggressions, privilege, and other topics related to social justice education, while providing opportunities for reflection, discourse, and capacity-building, may strengthen the inclusive environment that ADL Peer Trainers had already begun to foster. It is important for educators to provide opportunities for all students, not just those who are ADL Peer Trainers, to experience transformative learning related to perspectives of themselves and

of diverse others. Teaching for transformation might help all students broaden their perspectives, reduce biases, and increase empathy, ultimately creating a more inclusive school environment, which Cobb and Krownapple (2019) argued establishes a foundation for equity.

Finally, given the personal growth that participants attributed to their experiences as ADL Peer Trainers, educational leaders at Spruce High School should continue to evaluate, support, and strengthen the ADL Peer Training Program, investing time and financial resources in its implementation. While this study's findings indicated that participants' overall experiences as ADL Peer Trainers were positive, there is a need for data about other students' experiences with the program.

Research

As this study represented one of the few that examined the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program*, additional studies might be conducted on the program. First, researchers might design and conduct a quantitative or mixed-methods study related to this study's qualitative findings. For example, a survey could be administered before and after individuals are trained as ADL Peer Trainers to measure the degree to which participants increase their empathy or confidence as Peer Trainers. Second, researchers might conduct a study that examines to what extent this study's findings apply to different contexts. While this study examined participants' experiences in a predominately White high school setting, others might examine participants' experiences in more diverse contexts or middle grades. Third, this study did not gather demographic information related to participants' identification with minoritized or marginalized groups; however, during the three days of ADL Peer Training in 2021 and

during interviews and focus groups, some participants identified themselves as belonging to marginalized groups. Other researchers may examine ADL Peer Trainers' experiences while accounting for the various marginalized identities of participants. Doing so could result in findings that explore in what ways participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers intersect with various identities. Fourth, researchers might conduct a longitudinal study to examine in what ways participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers impact their lives five to ten years in the future.

While the current study focused exclusively on ADL Peer Trainers' experiences, other researchers may consider conducting a program evaluation to determine whether the ADL Peer Training program achieves its stated objectives. A study designed as a program evaluation could provide insight about the program's effectiveness as well as data that could inform implementation at the local level. Additionally, while this study included findings related to the experiences of ADL Peer Trainers, it did not examine the experiences of non-ADL Peer Trainers who were trained by their peers. Examining the experiences of non-ADL Peer Trainers could provide insight about their perspectives of the program and how they perceive its impact on themselves.

Recommendations

This study's findings strengthen our understanding of participants' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School, specifically related to transformative learning theory, empowerment, and social justice education. While the case study was bound by the context, including the predominately White, suburban high school, the participants, and the school's partnership with the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training program*, readers are encouraged to consider to what extent the findings apply

to their own contexts. Generally, findings support the growing number of studies that apply transformative learning theory to adolescents and suggest that an anti-bias education program that teaches for transformation may empower adolescents as social justice allies, particularly in homogenous communities.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School. Participants' experiences as anti-bias trainers in this context reflected transformative learning resulting in some degree of perspective transformation and action toward social justice. Although originally an adult-learning theory, findings suggest that transformative learning has a great deal of potential when applied to adolescents. More specifically, teaching for transformation through a program such as the ADL's *A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program* may challenge limited or inaccurate perspectives that individuals acquire from the environment in which they are raised. Furthermore, findings showed that ADL Peer Trainers at Spruce High School shifted from an exclusive to an inclusive perspective, began employing empathy to ensure that the language they used was culturally sensitive, found value in disagreement, shifted from bystanders to upstanders, prioritized respect to challenge bias, developed a passion for social justice beyond Spruce High School, and developed a positive self-image. Empowering adolescents as social justice allies through knowledge, capacity-building, and agency may foster more inclusive school environments and perhaps a more inclusive society.

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Appendix A

How ADL Peer Trainers Were Selected

At the time this study was conducted, ADL Peer Trainers were selected from the student body through a combination of criteria established by both the Anti-Defamation League and Spruce High School. The ADL required that students who participated in the training were sophomores or juniors so that they had a few more years in the school to apply the knowledge and skills they learned from the workshops. As the administrator who coordinated the program, during the school year before the training, I solicited recommendations for students from English I and English II teachers and from the multicultural club adviser, asking for names of students who have strong communication skills and who the teachers thought would be a good fit for the program. Then, I compiled a list of 25 students, met with them to explain the program, and gave them the opportunity to commit to the training. Typically, one or two students indicate that they cannot commit or are not interested in becoming ADL Peer Trainers, usually because of other extracurricular responsibilities. In general, though, few students decline the opportunity to become an ADL Peer Trainer in their high school.

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research



KEY INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

TITLE OF STUDY: Examining Students' Experiences as Anti-Defamation League Peer Trainers: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: Cecile H. Sam, Ph.D. (Co-Investigator David Knecht)

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide key information that will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study.

Please carefully read the key information provided in questions 1-9 and 14 below. The purpose behind those questions is to provide clear information about the purpose of the study, study specific information about what will happen in the course of the study, what are the anticipated risks and benefits, and what alternatives are available to you if you do not wish to participate in this research study.

The study team will explain the study to you and they will answer any question you might have before volunteering to take part in this study. It is important that you take your time to make your decision. You may take this consent form with you to ask a family member or anyone else before agreeing to participate in the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask the study team and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

The Principal Investigator, Cecile H. Sam, Ph.D., or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This study is part of Assistant Principal Dave Knecht's dissertation through Rowan University. The purpose is to learn more about students' experiences as Anti-Defamation League peer trainers at Seneca High School, including in what ways their experiences can inform social justice education at our school.

2. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you meet the study's criteria as an individual who was trained by the Anti-Defamation League as an ADL Peer Trainer in either 2019 or 2021.

3. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

You will be asked to participate in focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Participants can volunteer to take part in focus groups, interviews, or both. Focus group discussions, interviews, and observations will take place in a classroom at Seneca High School or virtually via Zoom or Google Meet.

4. Who may take part in this research study? And who may not?

All Seneca High School students or 2021 graduates who were trained by the Anti-Defamation League as ADL Peer Trainers in 2019 or 2021 are invited to participate in the study. No other students will be invited to participate.

5. How long will the study take and where will the research study be conducted?

The entire study will take approximately six months to complete. Participation in a focus group will take approximately 60 minutes, and participation in a one-on-one interview will take no more than 60 minutes. You will be interviewed in a classroom at Seneca High School or virtually via Zoom or Google Meet, depending on your preference and COVID-19 protocols at the time of the interview. You will not be taken out of class to participate.

6. How many visits may take to complete the study?

I will meet with students who take part in focus groups and interviews one time each and will visit the workshops in which students are trained by the ADL a total of three times.

7. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

There are no risks to students who do or do not take part in the study.

8. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

You will benefit by having the opportunity to engage in reflection through dialogue with others (for focus groups) and with the interviewer (for both focus groups and

one-on-one interviews). Engaging in reflection can be a beneficial experience for individuals. In addition, you will have the opportunity to contribute to a research study that may help improve policy, practice, and research.

9. What are the alternatives if you do not wish to participate in the study?

Your alternative is not to participate in the study.

10. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?

The study will include a maximum of 48 participants.

11. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

12. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

There is no cost to you or to your student.

13. Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

14. Are you providing any identifiable private information as part of this research study?

We are collecting identifiable private information in this research study, including name, age, and grade. Your identifiable information will not be used in any future research projects or disclosed to anyone outside of the research team.

15. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information.

Records and data will be stored on password-protected electronic devices that only the researcher can access.

16. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Cecile H. Sam, Ph.D. (e-mail: sam@rowan.edu; address: Rowan University, Herman D. James Hall, Room 3075).

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

17. Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Cecile H. Sam, Ph.D.
Rowan University
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
856-256-4500 x53827

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

18. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read the entire information about the research study, research risks, benefits and the alternatives, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed.

All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered and I agree to volunteer to participate in the study.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

**ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM**

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by David Knecht. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by David Knecht and for his dissertation as part of Rowan University's Ed. D. program.

The recording(s) will include your name, sex, and high school year.

The recording(s) will be labeled with your name and stored on a password-protected personal computer; it will be destroyed upon completion of David Knecht's doctoral program.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Printed Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol

RESEARCHER: The purpose of this research study is to examine your experiences as ADL Peer Trainers at your high school. The data will be used to help me complete my dissertation. Remember that your participation is voluntary and that I will use pseudonyms for you in the final report. Also, I wanted to remind you that I am going to record this discussion so I can have a record of what was said. Do you have any questions before we begin?

During the focus group conversation, you are encouraged to interact with one another and build upon each other's answers. I will pose questions, but I am mostly interested in hearing about your experiences.

RQ 2: In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainees empower them as social justice allies?

1. Think about your experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer. What impact do you think you have on your peers and on the school?
 - a. Potential follow-up: How does that make you feel?
2. In what ways might you use what you learned as an ADL Peer Trainer in the future?

RQ 3: In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?

3. What lessons or activities from the ADL Peer Training workshops do you think are most effective for teaching your peers to stand up for someone who is the target of bias or bullying? Why?
4. What are some of the challenges you face as an ADL Peer Trainer?
 - a. How did you (or *how will you* for the 2021 cohort) overcome them?
5. Based on your experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer, describe our school's strengths at creating an inclusive environment.
6. Based on your experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer, what recommendations do you have for creating a more inclusive school environment?

Closing

As a final activity, I would like each of you to share what you think are the key points from today's discussion.

Thank you for participating in the focus group discussion and for sharing your experiences. If you have any question, feel free to reach out at any time. I would also like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview where you will have the opportunity to share your experiences in more detail as I ask you some follow-up questions. I will send an email inviting you to participate.

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

RESEARCHER: The purpose of this research study is to examine your experiences as ADL Peer Trainers. Remember that your participation is voluntary and that I will use pseudonyms for you in the final report. Also, I wanted to remind you that I am going to record this interview so I can remember what you said. You will later have a chance to change anything that is not accurate. Do you have any questions before we begin?

RQ 1: In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?

1. Describe the knowledge and skills you have learned as an ADL Peer Trainer.
2. How have your experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer affected you personally?

The next few questions are going to ask you to compare yourself before you completed the ADL Peer Training with yourself now.

3. What did you learn as an ADL Peer Trainer, if anything, that you did not know before the training?
4. What beliefs or attitudes were altered, if any, because of your experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer?
 - a. *Ask only if participant experienced a change.* What did your role as an ADL Peer Trainer have to do with the change?
5. In what ways do you behave or act differently today, if any, compared to before you became an ADL Peer Trainer?
6. What did you learn, if anything, from having conversations with your peers about their perspectives and experiences?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as an ADL Peer Trainer that I did not ask about or that you think is important to share?

Thank you for participating in the interview. Is it OK if I send you a copy of the transcript so that you can check it for accuracy? If you have any follow up questions, feel free to reach out to me.

Appendix E

ADL Peer Trainers Field Notes Protocol

Research Questions:

1. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers reflect transformative learning?
2. In what ways do Spruce High School students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers empower them as social justice allies?
3. In what ways can students' experiences as ADL Peer Trainers inform social justice education at Spruce High School?

Field Notes should meet the following criteria:

- Include a description of activities in which participants are engaged.
- Include direct or paraphrased quotes that capture what participants say related to the research questions.
- Include the initial thoughts and reflections of the observer related to the research questions.

Date:		
Activity—What are participants doing?	What are participants saying?	Researcher reflections