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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND CRITERIA FOR

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ABSTRACT

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND CRITERIA FOR

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Geraldine Maurice

This exploratory study examines the correlations between teachers' attitudes and the

disproportionate representation of African American males in special educational

services in the United States education system. Using a sample of teachers from two

elementary schools with special education student representation proportional to the

student body population, the purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of teachers

with regard to student placement in special education programs. Specifically, this study

will focus on African American male student placements in special education and their

achievement on the Grade 3 English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency test. This study

employed a purposive sample of 4 members from two elementary schools with

proportional racial/ethnic and gender student representation in the special education

program. School faculty eligible for the study include two general and two special

education teachers. Scholars have been investigating the problem of African American

students who are overrepresented in special education for decades. Research has

consistently indicated a multitude of factors that have created this disproportionality.

However, limited research has focused on those schools and districts that have effectively

maintained proportionate representation of African American males in special education programs. The widespread misuse and unjust implementation of special education practice and assignments to special education programs urgently calls for a paradigm shift. The current special education paradigm needs to reflect practices informed by social justice and equity pedagogy and critical multicultural education.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The disproportionate representation of Black males enrolled in special education in the United States education system has caused growing concerns among civil rights advocates, particularly due to the mistreatment and reduced social capital resulting from stigmatized experiences among these children (Vasquez, 2012). Special education programs in the United States are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which was first passed in 1990 and renewed with modifications in 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; see especially § 1412(a)(1)(A)). The IDEA requires that children with disabilities be offered educational opportunities, termed special education. According to the most recent data from 2018, 14% of all children aged 3 to 21 years old receive services under the IDEA (NCES, 2019). The specific number of special education students in the United States serviced under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the year 2010 was approximately 6,436,000. Five years later, in 2015, the number of special education students in the United States under IDEA had increased to about 6,677,000. Three years later, in 2018, the number of students under IDEA was roughly 6,964,000. A year later, in 2019, this number once again increased to around 7,134,000 students (NCES, 2019). Unfortunately, the data for year 2020 is unavailable, as all of the websites researched referred back to the National Center for Education Statistics website for 2019. Based upon the research data available for the previous years of 2018 and 2019, the annual increase would be approximately 2.4 percent, which would bring the 2020 numbers to the

order of 7,308,000 students. Table 1 below compares special education rates in 2016 for major racial/ethnic groups across the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) NSCH and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data. Table 1 represents the distribution of students enrolled in special education and the percentage of African Americans and Whites enrolled in special education.

Table 1

Distribution of IDEA Students Enrolled in Special Education by School Year

Year	N	Percent African American	Percent White
2010	6,436,000	15.4	13.6
2015	6,677,000	15.5	13.7
2018	6,964,000	16.0	14.1
2019	7,134,000	16.3	14.1

Note. National Center for Educational Statistics, Digest of Educational Statistics.

Among the regulations of IDEA, two relate directly to the present research. First is the regulation related to identification of students where the law states that "each public agency must ensure that—(1) Assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a child under this part—(i) Are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis" (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004, § 300.304 (c)). Second is the requirement that students be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment, defined

as "(2) Each public agency must ensure that—(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004, § 300.114 (a)).

Inconsistent with the intent and ideals of the federal legislation, a higher proportion of Black male students in the public-school system are in special education classes (16%) as compared with the national average (14%) and all other racial groups other than Native American (NCES, 2019). Black students are overrepresented in the categories of Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, and Learning Disability. The overrepresentation has remained relatively stable in recent years. In 2010 Black students comprised 15.4% of Special Ed students while 13.6% were White students; for 2019 the numbers were 16.3% and 14.1% respectively. This illustrates an approximate 2% difference between the two groups when compared for those years, and the spread is approximately the same for all years in between.

Overrepresentation of Black students in special education was first identified in 1968 after the United States Office of Civil Rights issued a report. The follow up reports also indicated similar results. Citing the culturally biased nature of intelligence tests for judging student capability, along with evidence that Black students miss basic core academic curriculum while in special education programs. Patton (1998) suggested that a restructuring of the educational system is required, and further that "new structures,

systems, and paradigms are needed that allow for new knowledge producers in special education to make their voices heard and to approach the task of analysis and problem solving in honest ways" (p.30). Further, the excessive labeling of Black males with mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and behavioral issues negatively implicates these students, stigmatizing these students and creating teacher bias, often resulting in inaccurate determinations of deficits.

It has long been observed that schools have struggled to address the needs of the ethnically and racially diverse exceptional students (Harris, et al., 2004). Harris et al. (2004) identified a strong correlation between the deplorable conditions of special education programs and the disproportionately high placement of Black students in special education.

Black Students in Special Education

Blacks are more likely to be placed in lower track and remedial programs, which can result in negative academic outcomes. They are often placed in these programs because the identification and referral procedures employed to make these decisions are biased and unreliable (Blanchett, 2006). This has resulted in an overrepresentation of Black males in special education compared to White males in special education. The disparity is significantly more in low-income urban areas, where many Blacks live (Blanchett, 2006).

Anderson (2018) informed that Black students are generally at a disadvantage with regard to education compared to their White peers. According to Anderson not only is there a gap in reading and math scores when Black and White students are compared,

but Black students are more likely to be sent to another classroom or school for behavioral problems. The inference from the previous statement regarding being sent to a different classroom or school for behavioral problems is being placed in a more restrictive classroom environment (special education classes/schools); this along with other forms of discipline that Black students are more likely to receive than their White counterparts leads to impairment in college readiness (Anderson, 2018). As a result, Black students are more likely to be placed in a special education program for behavioral problems than White students. This violates the purpose of IDEA which requires the least restrictive learning environment. The lack of adherence to IDEA contributes to less favorable academic outcomes and lower standardized test scores among African American males in special education. The problem is even worse for students of color who are English Language Learners (ELLs) (Sullivan, 2011).

Unfortunately, many students placed in special education classes have not benefited from the placement, and often develop a sense of worthlessness that directly affects their attitude towards education and their academic outcomes (Anderson, 2018). Compounded with special education policymakers as contributors to the disproportionate placement and inadequate education delivered (Castro-Villarreal, et al., 2016), these outcomes have resulted in higher dropout rates, perceptions of intellectual inferiority, and perceived inability to think critically for Blacks compared to their White peers (Peterz, 1999; as cited in Hall, 2009, p. 4). Systematic mechanisms, through which institutional factors have disregarded and minimized the achievements of minority students in the school environment, have continued to discourage Black student success (Blanchett, 2016).

According to Rynders (2019) implicit bias contributes to the overrepresentation of Black students in the special education system. Teachers have biases that manifest in ways such as lower expectations for Black students (Rynders, 2019), which often lead teachers and administrators to place Black students in special education based upon subjective criteria. It is important to note that often these teachers and school officials do not know they hold such biases (Rynders, 2019). Several issues derived from teacher perceptions and biases have been identified as: (a) over-referral of minority students for special education; (b) biased assessment processes in the classroom; (c) biased interpretation of standardized assessments; (d) differential application of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process; and (e) the impact of perceived stereotypes in decision-making.

A study conducted by Jackson and Moore (2008), analyzed the portrayal of Black males seeking education in mass media. Their findings concluded most media publications negatively portrayed Black males as collectively failing rather than as individuals failing, when relevant. Additionally, they determined most media reported stereotypes that consistently made the Black students aware of negative images at an early age. The authors suggested researchers should include studies that present a resilient model as opposed to a deficit model, to highlight preventive measures and interventions regarding the education of Black males. Furthermore, Jackson and Moore (2008) note, in order for a resilient model to exist, more collaboration among researchers and practitioners in the educational media should take place.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions and attitudes of teachers with regard to student placement in special education programs. Using a sample of teachers from two elementary schools with special education student representation proportional to the racial composition of the student body population. Specifically, this study focused on Black male student placements in special education and the protocols used to identify those placements. Teachers were asked to describe their attitudes towards Parental Involvement, Interpretation of Ethnic Diversity, Stereotypes, Social Status, Racial Prejudice, and Instructional Practices in grades K-3.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: What are commonalities and discrepancies in the descriptions that K–3 teachers use to identify students with special needs and to refer these students to Committee on Special Education?

RQ2: What factors of teacher-administered formative assessments influence the referral of Black students for special education?

RQ3: How do the teacher-administered formative assessments affect the classification process of special education Black students in schools with high special education ELA proficiency compared with low special education ELA proficiency?

RQ4: Are there specific processes in the Response to Intervention process during which Black students who are suspected of having a learning disability are referred for a formal evaluation?

RQ5: Do ethnic diversity and the perceived stereotypes of teachers influence special education decision-making processes, and to what degree do the classroom interactions between students, parents and teachers influence these perceptions?

Definitions of Dimensions and Terms

Disproportionate Representation: Occurs when an unequal proportion of culturally diverse students are placed in special education programs (Chinn & Hughes, 1987, p. 43). Overrepresentation, as a specific form of disproportionate representation, occurs when the percentage of students with specific characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language background, gender, etc.) is higher than their proportion in the general population. For more than four decades, the overrepresentation of Black students in special education classes has been evident (Blanchett, 2009; Gardner & Miranda, 2001).

Proportionate Representation: When the percentage of students with specific characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language background, gender, etc.) is equitable with their percentage in the general population.

Emotional Disturbance (ED): "A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance, such as: "(a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears

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associated with personal or school problems" (Education, 2022, § 300.7(c)(4)(i)). "As defined by the IDEA, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance" (Education, 2022, § 300.7(c)(4)(ii)). Emotional disturbances are also referred to as emotional/behavioral disorders or behavioral disorders.

Educational Equity: The educational policies, practices, and programs necessary to eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities (including children in public or nonpublic institutions or other care facilities) are educated with children who are nondisabled. Removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (Hall 2009, 20–21).

Race: The self, as well as societal, imposed definition of a person or group (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 6). According to Tatum (1997) race "usually refers to the concept of dividing humans into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of characteristics. The most widely used human racial categories are based on visible traits (especially skin color, and self-identification" (Tatum 1997, as cited in Hall 2009, 22).

Special Education: Specially designed instruction and related services provided to students with disabilities, ages birth to 21 years. These services are provided in an environment "as near to an average classroom as possible" (Harry & Anderson, 1994, as cited in Hall, 2009, 22). Special education "also includes specially designed instruction to

meet the unique needs of a child with a disability" (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2022, § 1412(a)(5) (b)).

Response to Intervention (RTI): Response to Intervention is defined according to the New York State Department of Education as "the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs and using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions about an individual student." (NASDSE, 2006) Specifically, Response to Intervention is a pedagogical approach intended to strategically "close achievement gaps for all students, including students at risk, students with disabilities and English language learners, by preventing smaller learning problems from becoming insurmountable gaps. (NYSED, 2010).

Conceptual Rationale

African American students are overrepresented in special education, and previous research indicates a multitude of factors that have created this disproportionality; however, limited research has focused on those schools and districts that have effectively maintained proportionate representation of Black males in special education programs. Teachers working with special education programs with proportionate racial/ethnic and gender representations are a potential source of knowledge for developing programs that help Black males succeed, both in and beyond special education programs. According to Dyson and Gallannaugh (2008), the overrepresentation of children in special education from poor families, among boys, and among children from certain ethnic groups is connected. Specifically, the criteria by which mental health professionals diagnose these children do not account for circumstantial variation, including that based on culture or

race/ethnicity, creating biased recommendations that hinder the growth and advancement of these child populations.

Terry (2007) found that Black males in general are culturally more energetic and assertive which can lead to a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder. Popular and scientific publications often focus on the academic failings of Black males and portray negative views of them as well (Jackson & Moore, 2008). When jointly considered with the highly prevalent issue of absent parental involvement, Black students do not perform well academically, socially, or behaviorally when compared to White students (Brandon & Brown, 2009). Hall (2009) argues that:

> For decades, Black males have been disproportionately at risk of school failure and diminishing life chances. Numerous studies have chronicled the troubled status of Black males both academically and socially (Jordan, 2002; Lewit & Schuurmann-Baker, 1996; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Cartledge, 2004). The overrepresentation of Black males in special education emerged in the 1960s and has developed into an inequitable and denigrating method of educating Blacks, particularly males (Kunjufu, 2005). This observable fact has remained unresolved and has developed into a major problem for educators, school administrators, and governmental officials who issue mandates (Cartledge, 1997). (p. 16)

The seriousness of placing Blacks in special education classes gained prominent attention upon observation that: (1) they were more likely to be placed in the most restrictive classes, and (2) Blacks were then less likely to transition back to a general classroom; this still may be the situation (Kunjufu, 2005; Muhammed, 2016; Bowman, et al., 2018). According to Kearl (2019) Black students classified as having a need for

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special education are less likely to be mainstreamed back into the general education classroom than their White peers. In fact, legal solutions have been used in attempts to move Black students in special education back into the mainstream general education classroom (Kearl, 2019).

Again, Hall (2009) writes:

Peterz (1999) concluded classrooms have not been structured to meet the needs of Black male students and have unclear rules and expectations that have often placed these students at risk, resulting in higher dropout rates and/or the lack of opportunity to learn and practice pro-social and interpersonal skills or even in the loss of opportunity, to develop self-management skills (Harris et al., 2004; Kunjufu, 2005). (p. 6)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a pedagogical approach to guide curriculum and instruction from a lens of American institutional racism. Public and governmental figures vary greatly on their perception and intent to embed Critical Race Theory in schools. Critical Race theory is intentionally designed to provide a more accurate representation of Black life in America while contrasting the current paradigm, specifically in K-12 education (Sawchuck, 2021). The dominant curriculum and instruction taught across the majority of America lacks Critical Race Theory and places minority and special education students at a disadvantage.

Utley and Oblakor (2001) have contended that, in theory, the American educational system is based upon the democratic philosophy of equal educational opportunities for all children. They reasoned that it is on that premise children of all cultures, language, gender, and exceptionalities are educated. Therefore, the objective of

this research is to construct an educational framework that can assist in the restructuring of the old and outdated educational model that negatively affects educational outcome by operating against Black males in school and society and frequently placing them in special education programs.

Prior to the 1954 court ruling of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, the phenomenon of the disproportionality of Black males in special education was nonexistent. According to Hall (2009), any Black males performed at higher levels of achievement on a variety of academic measures and "were better educated and cared for in segregated schools" (p. 7). Hall (2009) continues:

> The purpose of the Brown versus the Board of Education Supreme Court ruling was to improve the educational opportunities for Blacks; however, Blacks have yet to attain what the Brown decision promised. Like *Brown*, the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 was designed to enhance and increase the educational attainment of students with special needs. The implementations of Brown (1954), as well as the IDEA of 1975, have not achieved the desired educational outcomes, either operationally or in terms of equity in academic outcomes, for Black students at present (Royster, 2004). According to Royster (2004), "Re-segregation has increased in recent years, and the overrepresentation of minority children in certain categories of disabilities has reached alarming proportions…special education is a place to put [Black] children" (p. 3). Special education and general education in the 21st century have developed into a dual system of education. As a result, the construct of special

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education, the placement of Black males into special education, and the meaning of special education in the 21st century remain in a state of flux. (p. 8–9)

The widespread misuse and unjust implementation of special education practices and assignments to special education programs urgently calls for a paradigm shift. Research suggests changes to the current special education paradigm need to reflect practices informed by social justice and equity pedagogy and critical multicultural education (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Leiding 2006; Sleeter & Grant 2007; Hall, 2009).

Significance of the Study

Fifty years after *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, public high schools have not been able to provide all children with an equal opportunity to receive a quality education (Balfanz & Legters, 2004, as cited in Hall, 2009, p. 17). Hall (2009) argues: "Current reality, however, offers a much more troubled picture. African American males in more than half of the nation's high schools do not graduate and, to a much lesser extent, leave high school prepared to fully participate in civic life" (p. 17). Hall (2009) says that, in particular, Black students who are enrolled in special education programs are at a great disadvantage as the result of misdiagnoses and inequitable education, and the long-term consequences of this problem persist into adulthood.

There is a high drop-out rate and a limited amount of preparation for life after high school associated with a special education placement. A two-year study conducted by Carter et al. (2012) found just over one quarter of young adults with disabilities were currently working when contacted after leaving high school. Additionally, Carter, et al. (2012) concluded meaningful employment for students with disabilities who leave school

lacking the essential skills and supports from quality educational training and learning are at a significantly greater disadvantage for meaningful employment. The continued disadvantages and lack of essential preparations through critical thinking further exacerbate the emotional effect from students' perceived disabilities they battle regarding negative reactions from peers and family. Emotionally, there is also an effect on special education students as they battle the negative reactions from peers and family due to their perceived disabilities (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2006).

A body of research (Fine & Weis, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Tatum, 1997) has shown an ever-increasing number of Black males are neither learning the essentials of literacy, mathematics, history, geography, and science, nor are they learning to be critical thinkers. They are far too frequently negatively impacted by teachers and placed in situations damaging to their psychological development, in large part due to the "Eurocentric curriculum that does not connect with their historical and sociocultural experiences" (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008), and an overall lack of engagement with curricula (Muhammad, 2016). Thus, African American male students are often not effectively educated because they are not fully engaged with the curriculum (Anderson, 2018), despite emerging research indicating an increased potential "to overcome adversity and utilize positive youth development assets and resources" (Gaylord-Harden, et al., 2018). These reports, along with others (Eitle, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004) suggest that future research assess the problem on a smaller scale. Specifically, the recommendations from these studies involve identifying additional perspectives from teachers, administrators, and families to better clarify the variables involved and find solutions for the disproportionate representation of minority children in special education.

The purpose of this study was to extend prior research by examining teachers'

perceptions and attitudes regarding the protocols and services provided towards

determining the disproportionate number of Black students in special education in

suburban and urban school districts.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter will provide an overview of the current literature on the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, and a number of the societal and educator-based correlates that contribute to this inequitable representation. Racial discrimination and civil rights violations may be underlying societal factors that explain the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education (Patton, 1998).

Patton (1998) suggested the need for Blacks and other minority educators to take part in the production of and changes with the process of identifying children in need of special education, and the delivery of high-quality educational services to this student population. Patton maintained that a paradigm shift is necessary to change the connotations around special education and Blacks and to encourage cultural acceptance of students in need of special education services. The current system fosters an incorrect and stifling experience for children and families of children in need of special education services, suggesting that special education services are for those with weaknesses. The new paradigm would reflect a sense of hope, and true liberation, and would allow special education students to develop and grow. To achieve this paradigm shift, it is imperative for the Black community to get involved (Patton, 1998).

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Critical Race Theory as it applies to special education. The remainder of the chapter is organized around the following themes related to the research questions: (a) over-referral of Black males in special education; (b) biased assessment in the classroom; (c) biased interpretation of tests; (d) biases in RTI processes; and (e) ethnic diversity and stereotypes.

Critical Race Theory and Special Education

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has provided a lens to examine the current educational system as being rooted in functional racism which perpetuates inequalities for diverse students who do not fit the traditional mold. While Critical Theory was first articulated in the Frankfurt School of Thought in Germany during the 1930s, most notably by the philosopher Jurgen Habermas, it was brought to the field of educational leadership by William Foster in 1980, who argued that organizations should be open to change when society demands it (Foster, 1980). Briefly, Critical Theory aims to relieve suffering and oppression through a disruption in power and a focus on social justice. An outgrowth of the research on Critical Theory was a focus on minority and marginalized groups that evolved into Critical Race Theory.

An early application of CRT to education was proposed by Tate (1997) and continued by scholars who examined educational systems (e.g., Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and defined key tenets of multicultural education, as well as proposed counter-narratives that promote equity-based practices and challenge racial inequities (e.g., Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). As applied to the present study, CRT provides a framework for examining the responses of participants to identify either congruence or lack thereof in siding with a functional structuralism stance that maintains White ascendance and marginalizes difference in an early elementary setting.

Within the functional structuralism perspective prevalent in education today, the child or their family are blamed for negative outcomes since they are considered to operate outside of White norms. Differences in learning style, self-identity, language, and economic resources are systematically marginalized. Response to Intervention practices

is critiqued as well, due to their overreliance on evaluating and labeling students, and creating separate systems of intervention. Students must be in a position of failing before any help is provided, and support takes the form of fragmenting the student's school day while they move in and out of segregated settings. The practices maintain historic systems of oppression (Capper, 2019).

On the other hand, CRT advocates for transforming instruction in a way that meets the learning needs of all students and removes barriers created by inappropriate assessments and segregated programs. It focuses on an asset perspective where students, their families and communities are viewed as bringing value to the school system. These assets are integrated into the system to enrich education for all. Within CRT practices, educators must broaden the curriculum to recognize student assets, change instructional practices to be inclusive for all, and reduce reliance on biased criteria imposed by external standards and expectations.

Over-Referral of Black Males in Special Education

Research reports of over-representation of Black males in special education were presented in Chapter 1, based on data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019) as well as analyses that report on the history and persistence of the trend. According to Ford and Russo (2016) Black students are twice as likely as their Caucasian peers to be identified as having an intellectual disability or emotional problem. Additional national research by Grindal et al. (2019) based on the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data of 2013-2014 reported that racial disparities in identification are more prevalent in school settings for categories of learning and emotional disabilities, as

compared with clinical settings where deafness or blindness may be diagnosed by healthcare workers. The authors also reported that minority students were more likely to be placed in more restrictive settings than White students with the same special education diagnoses. Quite simply, this means that when compared to their Caucasian peers, Black students are more likely to be placed in a classroom with intellectually or emotionally disabled students, and as such do not participate in the regular classroom environment (Ford & Russo, 206).

One contributing factor to overrepresentation has been that African American male students are more often referred for disciplinary reasons and more likely to be placed under the category of emotional disturbance. Data from a national analysis of the Civil Rights Data Collection reports from all states in the U.S. by Gage et al. (2019) continues to provide evidence that exclusionary disciplinary practices such as suspension and expulsion are implemented almost four times more often for African American males as compared with other ethnic groups, especially for students with disabilities. Several factors that lead to over-referral have been examined and are discussed below, grouped by studies on the various professionals who are involved in the referral process.

School Counselors and Special Education Referral

The use of unreliable or inaccurate referral procedures was referenced by Adkison-Bradley et al. (2006) as part of the cause of the overrepresentation of Black males in special education. A qualitative study of counselor perceptions of overrepresentation of Blacks in special education in an Alabama school with a history of overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, found that school counselors were also

confused by the cause of overrepresentation of Blacks in special education (Shippen, et al., 2009). School counselors focused on the disconnect between the community and the school environment. Technological advances were cited as hindrances to the special education process and as learning distractions. The counselors felt blame for the overrepresentation in special education of Blacks and called for more administrative staff input and contribution to enforce appropriate assessment methods for improved results. They also requested additional job training to update their knowledge base and improve their abilities to perform properly the assessment/referral/intervention practices associated with special education process (Shippen et al., 2009).

The role of the school counselor as related to the educational environment has dramatically increased in recent decades. There is an increased drive to focus on the needs of students with disabilities. Some strategies suggested by Adkison-Bradley et al. (2006) for the school counselor to use when working with students with disabilities are described. One strategy included advocating for students and empowering students to advocate for themselves. By helping students achieve their own level of personal power, counselors can create an individual with drive and motivation to stand up to negative factors. Another strategy was to assess classroom learning environments to make certain that there were no environmental factors affecting a student's development. Another was to provide data to support the need for services and contact family members and teachers to get an overall understanding of a student's picture. It can also be helpful for school counselors to be more culturally aware of practices common among Black families. Thus, a collaborative effort is important for accurate placement (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2006).

Parental involvement, or lack thereof, is also an important factor in appropriate

placement in special education services that can be somewhat influenced by the role of

school counselors. School counselors can facilitate relationships with families to

ascertain the level of involvement typical for a specific family, and the desire for

achievement put forth within the home. Counselors can provide students with information

regarding other resources in the school that can assist them with their educational goals

such as extra help, tutoring, etc. They can also provide a level of emotional support for a

student to share potential situations that might be influencing their ability to learn

(Adkison-Bradley et al., 2006).

Bias in Overrepresentation

While much of the following is interwoven in the following sections something

should be included here regarding the role of bias in the overrepresentation of Black

students in special education. As stated in the introduction, there is bias, both implicit and

explicit, which contributes to the overrepresentation of Black students (especially male)

in special education classes. Rydners (2019) states that referrals by school staff members

may be subject to implicit bias that these educators have against students of color and/or

students with disabilities. These biases become evident in the referral process of teachers,

administrators, and many of those involved in the assessment of students for special

education. These biases manifest themselves sometimes subconsciously and as such the

person does not realize bias is influencing their choices (Rydners, 2019). The literature

has identified the following issues related to teacher perceptions and bias: (a) over-

referral of minority students to special education; (b) biased assessment processes in the

classroom; (c) biased interpretations of standardized assessments; (d) differential application of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process; and (e) the impact of perceived stereotypes on decision-making.

Sullivan et al. (2015) stated that when examining the problem of Black students being overrepresented in special education often the lens used is the personal; teacher bias (regardless of whether it is implicit or explicit bias) falls into the personal and not system lens. Teachers have different expectations of Black students with regards to learning, achievement, and behavior and this leads to inaccurate expectations of these students (Sullivan et al., 2015). Often these expectations manifest themselves in negative expectations of Black students when compared to their non-Black peers (Sullivan et al., 2015). These biases potentially lead to teachers (and administrators) in classrooms assessing Black students differently (Sullivan et al., 2015); special education placement may be a result of this. Morgan et al. (2020) stated that at least theoretically bias may have been used in the South against Black students in their placement in special education to delay desegregation. The previous represents systemic issues relating to bias and how it manifests itself in the overrepresentation of Black students in special education.

As per assessment for special education placement, Sadeh and Sullivan (2017) stated that current assessment practices involve interdisciplinary teams and are far from perfect; moreover, the authors inferred that problems relating to evaluations relate to the absence of a holistic approach to evaluation. Meanwhile, Rydners (2019) stated referrals made for special education assessment based upon implicit bias cause problems for

safeguards in the assessment process making it more likely for a student who does not need to be placed in the special education classroom to be so placed.

Teachers and Special Education Referral

Shippen et al. (2009) examined teachers' perceptions of Black student overrepresentation in special education classes. A number of common causes of the issue with minorities in special education include intelligence test bias, cultural bias, inadequate assessment methods, and teacher bias (Shippen et al., 2009). Educators were provided with a questionnaire asking them to comment on their thoughts regarding overrepresentation, their ideal school model, how to effect change, and other areas of concern related to special education. Participating general education teachers were mostly unaware of the problems in special education, mistakenly reporting the school demographic statistics as the reason for the overrepresentation. The referral and assessment process for special education was deemed to be ineffective. Parental involvement was also mentioned as a major contributor to academic success (Shippen et al., 2009). Special education teachers noted that a diagnosis of mental retardation was common among Black children, and identified socioeconomic factors, parental involvement, and limited early intervention services, as significant contributors to the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education; however, when asked to address the referral process, special education teachers believed the process was effective. Instead, special education teachers felt that the area of assessment was the primary issue. They claimed that eligibility for special education services should be data driven and not subjective. Special education teachers also felt that parental involvement played a large

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role in the learning process. Parents with little to no involvement often resulted in students with difficulty appreciating, accepting, and thriving during the learning process (Shippen et al., 2009).

Overall, the study conducted by Shippen et al. (2009) indicated that there is a misunderstanding in education regarding the cause of overrepresentation in special education of Blacks. There is also a general consensus that the assessment and referral process should be updated and restructured in order to effect change. Training for staff regarding cultural bias and working with a diverse population was also discussed as highly valued. There was also a sense that increasing parental involvement was another priority in order to assist the learning process (Shippen et al., 2009).

Biased Interpretation of Assessments

Another area in need of change, according to Gravois and Rosenfield (2006), is related to bias in the assessment process for special education. As discussed by many researchers in the area of overrepresentation of Black students in special education, intelligence tests are biased and do not accurately indicate the learning abilities of minority students. As a result, there has been some movement to procure culturally fair tests, but there has not yet been a great deal of success in this area. The idea of using intelligence tests for classification instead of diagnoses has been suggested under the current circumstances (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) suggested instructional Consultation Teams (ICT) in order to maintain student success within an educational environment. These teams support the classroom teacher by helping to improve classroom instruction. The

performance of the teacher is directly correlated to the performance of the student. Thus, ICT teams generate an understanding that through observation, data collection, problem-solving steps, and reflection, a teacher can maximize learning potential (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Since the implementation of the ICT, schools using an ICT model had a reduction of total referrals of students in special education. The number of incorrectly placed minority students also decreased as compared to schools using traditional methods of placement.

Effects of Poverty on Assessments

. A case study of a single elementary school found that the majority of students referred for special education services came from a low socioeconomic background.

The school system bears a significant responsibility to improve the special education process by properly educating staff, particularly focusing on methods of delivery to provide quality educational experiences for students of color (Shealey & Scott Lue, 2006), and particularly those students living in impoverished conditions.

Effects of Culture on Assessments

Culturally responsive instruction requires teachers to become culturally aware of the diverse needs of different student groups, and to incorporate this knowledge into their teaching methods. Most frequently, however, teachers negatively react to students of different backgrounds because there is a disconnect in communication between the students and teachers, resulting in some behaviors incorrectly characterized as a deficiency instead of diversity. According to Shealey and Scott Lue (2006):

In fact, due to an emphasis on what some have called the standardizing of output measurements such as student performance rather than on the essential inputs like a culturally responsive curriculum, many standards-based initiatives fall short of meeting anticipated expectations and students of color continue to be left behind. (p. 4)

The overrepresentation of Black students in special education is associated with the lack of cultural awareness and recognition of diversity among teachers. The lack of awareness and diversity result in the misunderstandings that lead to excessive referrals of students for special education services. Shealey and Scott (2006) expressed districts expenditure towards addressing the lack of culturally responsive awareness and recognition for teacher diversity is necessary to reduce the overrepresentation of Black students in special education.

Ethnic Diversity and Stereotypes

The educational playing field is still not level for students from all cultures (Adkison-Bradley, et al., 2006). Black males represented only 9% of the total student population in public schools, but account for more than double of the enrollment percentage in the category of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disabilities (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2006). Research by Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) reported that Black males were identified as mentally retarded at twice the rate of other races. They also stated that cultural variables, assessment bias, and a lack of intervention services have contributed to the excessive referral rate among minority students (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

One reason suggested by Adkison-Bradley and colleagues (2006) for the overrepresentation stems from the fact that the majority of the U.S. teaching force is White, middle-class females from White neighborhoods who attended predominantly White schools. The media portrayal of Black men as unmotivated, drug addicts, criminals, or with low intelligence has informed some teachers perceptions about students in their classroom, giving teachers an unintentional cause for alarm prior to educational practices taking place. As Adkison-Bradley et al. (2006) pointed out, "It is important to note that research has shown that many teachers make their special education referral decisions primarily on the extent to which they believe a child is 'teachable' or non-threatening" (p. 3).

Teacher referral has been cited as the most significant factor to examine regarding special education (Chu, 2011). The perception that teachers have in relation to a specific student can greatly influence an incorrect referral. The inappropriate diagnosis of students with different race, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds questions whether the issue is disability or simply diversity.

Two factors identified as influencing teacher referrals for special education are student characteristics such as ethnicity and behavior type. Researchers began to examine teacher characteristics as well such as gender, experience, student interaction, and stereotype biases. Sullivan (2017) discussed the issue in the context of disproportionality in the area of categorization of emotional disturbance. Her analysis reported on the conceptual, psychometric, procedural, and causal issues related to overrepresentation of African American males in this category. One issue was a lack of consensus on definitions of what constitutes problem behavior as compared to a disability, as well as a

conflation with psychiatric illnesses. Another was the perception of White teachers of behaviors of African American boys as being more troublesome than similar behaviors of White boys.

Negative teacher perceptions continue to be observed, as reported in a study by Marsh and Noguera (2019) of African American male students in a "no excuses" charter school that was designed for that population. Teachers often criticized students for exhibiting behaviors that were considered impolite and treated masculinity as deviant. Their perceptions were based on stereotypes of Black males as being drawn to criminality and gangs and therefore in need of harsh disciplinary actions for infractions.

Summary

The literature review presented suggests that the overrepresentation of minorities in special education has persisted since the inception of special education services in public schools in the mid-1900s and is sustained by the diagnosis procedures used by the school faculty and the educational system. While prior research has focused overwhelmingly on reporting data regarding overrepresentation, there has been less work on teacher perceptions and how they affect this outcome. Existing studies have focused on middle and high schools, with almost no research on issues that begin in the early grades. Building on this body of literature, the proposed research will address teacher perceptions and attitudes regarding Black male overrepresentation in special education classes in K-3 settings, thus adding to the understanding of the issue.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The present study uses in-depth qualitative interviews from four teachers in K-3 settings at two public elementary schools to investigate their perspectives on referral and identification of African American males for special education placement. In this chapter, the procedures used to design the study, recruit participants, collect data, and construct analytic frames will be presented. The study uses an inductive constant-comparative method, an aspect of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2015) which is applied to generating theoretical propositions. Although the study is relatively small in scale, the topic addressed is not highly represented in prior research (understanding referral and identification of K-3 grade African American males for special education), the theories and models derived from studies on secondary students and other racial/ethnic groups do not sufficiently address the issue. It is anticipated that Grounded Theory will assist in constructing new insights that are specific to the target group. The propositions that are derived will then be reviewed in light of critical race theory in Chapter 4.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are commonalities and discrepancies in the descriptions that K-3 teachers use to identify students with special needs and to refer these students to Committee on Special Education?

RQ2: What factors of the writing process influence the referral of the students for special education?

RQ3: How do the teacher-administered formative assessments affect the classification process of special education students in schools with high compared to low special education ELA proficiency?

RQ4: Are there specific points in the RTI process during which students who are suspected of having a learning disability are referred for a formal evaluation?

RQ5: Do ethnic diversity and the perceived stereotypes of teachers influence special education decision-making processes, and to what degree do the classroom interactions between students, parents and teachers influence these perceptions?

Setting

Permission to conduct this study was granted from the Institutional Review Board of Dowling College. Permission was granted by the superintendent and respective building principal of the participating districts, for each teacher subject interviewed. The participants in this study were K-12 public educators certified in special education and elementary education. The subjects learning environments represented suburban and urban public schools in the Northeast of the United States. The schools varied in their percentage of Black students representing between seven and twenty-five percent of the student demographics. Each of the public schools have clearly stated mission statements focused on meeting the needs of the individual child, creating a positive learning environment, and fostering lifelong learners. The primary data gathering technique consisted of in-person verbal interviews. During the course of the interviews the researcher took notes that would help supplement and confirm the transcripts which were recorded and transcribed by a third-party.

Interviews were conducted off-site to ensure minimal interruption and reduce concern of anonymity with responses to questions. The selected teachers were identified by their experience, certification, access, and willingness to participate. All interviewees signed a confidentiality form and were not compensated or provided any additional reward for participation.

Using a sample of two general and two special education (SE) teachers of grades K-3, this study will investigate attitudes towards interpretation of ethnic diversity, stereotypes, social status, racial prejudice, and instructional practices at two elementary schools with proportional Black student placement in special education.

A sample of four teachers from two districts proportional racial/ethnic and gender student representation in the special education program will be drawn. Participants' background characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Description of Participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years/Experience
Teacher A	Female	Caucasian	less than 10
Teacher B	Female	Caucasian	more than 10
Teacher C	Female	Black	more than 10
Teacher D	Female	Hispanic	more than 10

Note: The participants involved in the study.

Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview protocol for the teachers included 14 items. The interview protocol questions were developed after a review of the research literature. The interview protocol questions consisted of questions regarding how teachers describe their attitudes towards parental involvement, interpretation of ethnic diversity, stereotypes, social status, racial prejudice, the special education referral process, and instructional practices in grades K-3. Table 3 presents the research sources for the various dimensions within the interview protocol.

Table 3

Dimensions, Source, and Interview Questions

Dimension	Source	Interview Question
Parental Involvement	Barta & Winn (1996); Comer, & Haynes (1991); Frutcher, Galleta, & White (1992).	2, 2a, 2b, 3, 3a, 3b, 4, 5
Interpretation of Ethnic Diversity	Agued, Ballesteros & Malik (2003); Corso, Santos, & Roof (2002); Gay, (2002).	6, 7, 8, 9
Stereotypes	Stephan (1999).	10, 16
Social Status	Collins, Leondar-Wright, & Sklar, (1999).	11, 12

Racial Prejudice	Byrnes & Kiger (1990); Feagin & Sikes (1994)	13, 14
Instructional Practices	Au & Blake (2003); Benson (2003); Brophy & Good (1986); Henderson (2009).	1, 15

Note: The dimensions, source, and Interview Questions

Data Analysis

The procedures that define a grounded theory approach will be used to guide the data analysis for the present study (Tie, et al., 2019), as follows:

1. Purposive sampling. The present study builds on prior research related to referral and identification of students of color in special education. In order to examine teacher perspectives through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the participants were selected from both general and special education backgrounds. This permitted a comparison of perspectives from both settings to develop a stronger understanding of the constructs.

2. Generating and collecting data. All interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings as the primary source of data. Descriptive and reflective field notes were taken during the interviews to assist with providing a context for the transcription. The responses provided by the teachers were analyzed for themes emerging within and across participants.

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3. Initial coding. Data were coded to identify initial codes that appeared in the transcribed responses. Codes were then collapsed into categories of similar themes. Units of text that supported overarching themes, patterns, and discrepancies among the teachers' responses were extracted to provide supportive data.

4. Intermediate coding. A constant-comparative approach was applied to identify relationships and contrasts among the responses of the participants. This allowed for a more inductive analysis and served to validate earlier themes. Data saturation was established once all the perspectives were identified and coded and assigned to themes.

5. Advanced coding. The themes and propositions were connected to the precepts of Critical Race Theory. Further examination of the data was conducted to validate the connections and create a cohesive narrative.

6. Development of grounded theory. A final report of the data was developed that discussed the themes in relationship to the research questions that formed the basis for the present study.

Trustworthiness and Validity of the Research Design

The internal validity of a qualitative study is the extent to which the design and data gathered allows the researcher to draw conclusions about relationships within the data (Leedy, 2010). The interview questions in this study are based in prior research and designed to obtain rich, thick, and descriptive data with regards to the research topic in order to make clear connections between the questions and responses.

To ensure the semi-structured interview protocol examined the dimensions under study, a pilot interview was conducted with a non-participating elementary school teacher. Once the interview was completed, it was coded and analyzed based on emergent themes. An expert in qualitative methods performed an audit trail to verify the interpretation of the themes that emerged from the pilot interview. Interview questions, including probing questions, were modified based on the results of the pilot interview.

After the interviews with the study participants, member checks were performed to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data. Data were found to be an accurate transcription of the interviews, further supported by my notes and memos.

Descriptive validity was maintained by ensuring the accuracy of the account of participants' lived experiences using their quotations verbatim throughout the study. Theoretical validity was maintained based on the degree to which assertions in the research literature about the phenomenon under study paralleled the reality of participants' lived experiences (Gay, et al., 2009). Comparison and contrast of participant responses supported the themes and related inferences.

Research Ethics

Permission to conduct an interview was granted by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Dowling College and the Superintendent of Schools (Appendix A) from the participating school district. Further approvals were obtained from the Institutional Review Board of St. John's University.

The listing of available teachers within the districts was requested from the superintendent. Teachers who agreed to participate were required to complete an

informed consent document prior to participation in the interviews that ensured that they

were aware of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, voluntary

participation, and audio-recording of interviews.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The goal of my interviews was to gather information from teachers that aligned with the dimensions outlined in my Research Design and Methodology Chapter. Below are my study results organized by research questions. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the processes by which students are referred for special education and curriculum in the classroom were gathered in response to research questions one and two. These questions sought to uncover the commonalities and discrepancies in the descriptions that K-3 teachers use to identify students with special needs and to refer these students to the Committee of Special Education.

The demographics of the four teachers interviewed vary in school districts and school size. Three of the teachers interviewed work in large, diverse suburban school districts, where school size is approximately 600 students in each building. One of the teachers interviewed worked in a large city setting where the student population was approximately 800.

Research Question One

What are commonalities and discrepancies in the descriptions that K-3 teachers use to identify students with special needs and to refer these students to the Committee on Special Education? These identified findings are in line with what was expected as these resources are part of protocol for elementary school teachers.

The teachers' identified students with special needs in two thematic areas. The first theme explored their utilization of school policies as guidance for their decision-

making. The second theme focused on their partnership with other educational staff members at their school.

School policies that are used for teacher decision making revolve around The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is a modification of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This law ensures that special needs students receive appropriate free public education in the least restrictive environment necessary to meet those students' needs. It helps students receive the extra assistance they need but allows them to participate in the same activities as children without special needs whenever possible. Within IDEA, these are the 13 disability categories that can qualify a child for special education services. Every student who gets special education is covered by the IDEA. Kids with disabilities must also receive special education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). There must be a continuum of placements available, from self-contained to inclusion classrooms.

The partnership with other educational staff members at their school emerged as a theme. This finding is relevant because partnerships are an effective tool that allow general educators, special educators, learning specialists, administrators, and other stakeholders to work together to meet the needs of students. Partnerships are particularly important to sustain inclusive settings. No single educator should be responsible for holding the expertise in the infinite presentations of learner variability. Further, students work with multiple adults within a school building. Partnerships and collaborations create safe conditions for students and educators to share knowledge and collectively problem-solve. The primary purposes of partnerships with educational staff members in schools include: (a) identifying and sharing effective academic; (b) behavior and social-emotional

instructional practices; (c) ensuring that practices are consistent across all providers; and (d) ensuring that the students benefit from those practices.

Collaboration Among Staff Members

One teacher clearly identified the members of the team she stated:

Teacher 3: My first step would be to go to 1ST team meeting, to meet with the school psychologist, behavioral specialist, social worker, principal, and some of the other support service teachers. That's where we would start to implement a plan.

In contrast, the referral process for Teacher 1 also reported that she meets with other staff members. She stated:

Teacher 1: I would meet with the student's guidance counselor, speak to my administrator and go forward once we've made a determination.

Teachers were also asked to reflect on teacher-administered formative assessment and how they affected the classification process of special education students in schools. Teacher 1 generally used writing samples and took part in weekly meetings to discuss the progress of students. Teacher 1 discussed discrepancies with various rubrics. Teachers' individual mindsets on how students work should be interpreted.

Research Question Two

What factors of the writing process influence the referral of the students for special education?

Effective School Policies

All the teachers agreed that a student's ability to write and/or generate ideas to write is a critical assessment tool. They disagreed, however, on the writing assessment format. One teacher strictly adhered to state ELA exams. She shared:

> Teacher 1: As of right now, we're relying heavily on the New York State ELA exams. That is a starting point and a focal point. If a child, let's say, falls between one and two, right there, that's a clear indication that there's a deficiency. That could be your primary point of beginning the referral. But that wouldn't be the only thing. That in conjunction with whatever my other concerns were. So, the ELA test and what I've been observing prior to that. That's a whole picture. The ELA test is playing a huge part.

In contrast, her colleague expressed frustration about the writing process. She reported the following:

> Teacher 2 That's another pet peeve of mine, is that I really feel that teachers would do more informal writing if we didn't have to be so worried about the writing being assessed and I feel that we would do more informal writing and we could have a better gauge than just doing the formal writing and sit, because I feel that the students fall short on the formal writing.

> School policies are great in their written form; however, the application and interpretation of the rubric is where the bias comes through. Writing samples serve as evidence of the assumptions of student achievement (or lack thereof).

While we know that written school policies are reviewed for robustness and comprehensiveness, shortcomings like achievement gaps appear to be getting wider along with deficits in government funding.

Research Question Three

How do the teacher- administered formative assessments affect the classification process of special education students in schools with high compared to low special education ELA proficiency?

Use of Instructional Practices

One theme emerged: the use of instructional practices. One teacher reported that her teacher assessments were undervalued:

Teacher 2: I don't feel they impact as much as they should. I feel that a formal assessment is looked at more carefully than teacher-made tests or classroom tests. I feel that teacher recommendation and teacher observation is not always given the most credibility. I wish it was given more.

A different teacher expressed more confidence in the teacher-administered formative assessments:

Teacher 1: The tracking system that I have for that student in particular. I have I'm going to say, "a file" on each student where I would compile a portfolio of documentation. I would keep the class work, etc., and I would have some points. I would also map out where I see some progress and where the student is going, etc. So, there's a tracking system that's used.

In the public school system formal assessments tend to be the standard for assessment determination. This is in line with the literature, as state testing is standardized and quantified. There is a growing trend of parents opting out of their students taking standardized tests, suggesting that formative assessments maybe relied on more regularly.

Teachers were also asked about the Response to Intervention (RTI) process in their special education classes. Their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs were addressed in research question five.

Research Question Four

Are there specific points in the RTI process during which students who are suspected of having a learning disability are referred for a formal evaluation?

The data collection showed cohesion on points when referrals are made. By the time a student is referred to RTI, they have already been flagged as having a learning disability, this process then gathers more data for which level of support is best fit for that student by tiers (including classroom removal). This process spans over the course of the academic year, based on the identification of the process and the timeline of the process. Parents do not always fully understand the RTI process, and this limits their involvement.

Two themes emerged, dividing responses. The first theme reflected the teachers' uncertainty about the effectiveness of RTI. The other theme reflected teachers' optimism about the process.

Ineffectiveness of RTI

One participant was uncertain about how RTI was going to be implemented in her school:

Teacher 2: I'm just hoping that those children who were making good progress and were on the border on being grade level are going to slip through the cracks. That's my greatest fear—that they're being put in a General Ed class, but those pull-out services are being taken away and they're just going to be monitored by the classroom teacher. That's a fear for me"

There was concern about whether RTI would be the only method used for identifying students' learning disability. There were also concerns about their level of training, whether they would know enough about the process to implement it.

Optimism on RTI Process

Another teacher stated that the RTI process was in its infancy, but her tone and body language relayed a sense of optimism. She outlined the process as follows:

Teacher 3: We just started the RTI process this year, so it's very new to us. We're actually really starting it next year. We started by making a plan for each student that talks about their deficits and areas that they need to improve on. Then I believe next year, they'll be monitored on whether or not they made progress towards those goals. We take it into consideration, and then that that'll determine whether or not they get services.

Generally, the RTI process is standardized for the school year and across school districts. With time, paperwork has increased, and student outcome objectives have lost focus.

Research Question Five

Do ethnic diversity and the perceived stereotypes of teachers influence special education decision-making processes, and to what degree do the classroom interactions between students, parents and teachers influence these perceptions?

Research question five elicited responses from the teachers in three thematic areas. The first theme showcased their discomfort discussing possible stereotypes and biases. The second theme reflected the teachers' stereotypes about socioeconomic status which was unveiled when they discussed parental involvement. The third theme provided information about their stereotypes by asking for their opinions on cultural products such as music, film, and books.

Discomfort

Most of the teachers interviewed were hesitant to divulge information about possible cultural biases in decision-making processes of special education classification. I could sense that they were uncomfortable with the question based on their body language, delayed responses, and momentary speechlessness. For example, the transcription of one of the responses reads as follows:

Teacher 3: I know. I'm trying to think. I can't say I see a lot of—I don't really see a lot of that. I'm pretty open-minded.

Another teacher deflected the question by providing an example of when a student displayed cultural insensitivity. She commented that:

Teacher 2: I do know that a boy was building with blocks, and he was building a tower right after 9/11 and he was using something as a plane. I didn't have planes, but he is using some toy as a plane. He knocked into the tower and did say, "Stupid Americans." That is the only time that I saw—some type—and really that's the only time that I can think of.

Only one teacher provided a concrete example of cultural bias influencing decision-making. She responded that:

Teacher 3: Well, the biggest one that comes to mind is the Spanish-speaking students. There's a lot of talk about whether or not the students are actually learning-disabled or just don't know the language. I think that would be the biggest one.

Socioeconomic Status

Due to the inability of the participants to provide full disclosure of deliberate racial/ethnic bias in the decision-making process I asked follow-up questions to obtain information on possible implicit biases. The questions were regarding socioeconomic status and their view of specific genres of television shows, movies, music, or books. I asked three separate questions about socioeconomic status and its relationship to special education classification. The first round of answers elicited responses that were brief and lacked detailed. For example, one teacher stated:

Teacher 1: I do. I honestly do. I think it's been proven many times over.

I prompted with a second question and her response was:

Teacher 1: As I said before, being that that's not my population, I think it goes

back to the same thing with the general education population, yes.

In response to the third question, she stated:

Teacher 1: That's a good question. That's a very good question, and I will venture

to say it's probably so and the reason I say that is because as a defect—when we

say special education students, there are different facets of special education. So,

it may be students who are deficient in reading, in numeration, who might need

more assistance in that, but, as I said before, who are unable to get that assistance

at home. So, when they come into the building now, we're trying to make up for

that. There's a lot of different ways to explore that and see it.

Her response to the third question contained a theme that was reflected in the

answers of other teachers. They all agreed that socioeconomic status made a difference

and alluded to the same reason (i.e., because parents with low socioeconomic status are

less involved in their children's learning). Below are a few examples:

Teacher 1: Students who come from a lower income level background, they may

have difficulty obtaining resources that someone who is in a higher economic

status would have. If a parent's primary focus is putting food on the table, getting

their child to school, etcetera, they might not have the same advantages as

somebody who has assistance after school when they get home—someone who's

working with them. The family makeup plays a huge role, I believe, on how a

child comes in and performs in the classroom because our focuses can be

different.

Teacher 2: I would say yes, that has to play a factor. I do see it plays a factor. I'm not in the homes.

Teacher 3: They can't really get as much help at home. I think that makes a big difference.

Teacher 4: But I really feel that we don't know if they're not getting any support at home.

One teacher, however, disagreed. She felt that the job of the educator was to ensure that socioeconomic status did not negatively affect the child's academic success. Her response was as follows:

Teacher 4: No, I don't believe that. I believe—no, I don't think so. Because they can—just because they may not financially have the money to go out and buy what they need, doesn't—has nothing to do with what they have up here. That's what I feel. I mean if I have a child, I'll provide whatever school supplies the child needs, just to help them get through the year. If they don't get the support at home, I have extra hands in my classroom to be able to help them do their homework and do things like that.

Although all the teachers interviewed mentioned parent involvement in the home as a critical factor in academic success there was a stark difference in the explanation of factors that may contribute to reduced parental engagement. Some teachers recognized that there were psychological, social, and institutional barriers to parent involvement. For example, one teacher noted:

Teacher 2: I think it's probably fear. I think they fear they are not educated enough. They feel like they don't have the experience. Whatever it is, I don't

think it's for lack of interest. I think it's for fear of, they don't know as much as

they think they know. They know more than they think they do.

Another teacher commented on possible language barriers:

Teacher 3: If their parents came over from another country and they don't speak

English, they can't really get as much help at home. I think that makes a big

difference.

At other times they made no mention of possible barriers. This leaves the

impression that the parents are at fault:

Teacher 2: I don't know why more minority parents aren't involved, especially

fathers. I have to say fathers. I don't know why they're not more involved.

Teacher 4: I don't think it matters whether they are Special Ed or General Ed. I

think it's about what's going on in their homes.

Cultural Products

Cultural products are defined as "aesthetic features and production technologies

that are deeply enmeshed in each artisan's local traditions" (Littrell & Miller, 2001).

They can include music, film, and books, as well as cultural days in school, and vary by

race and ethnicities. In addition to themes that address socioeconomic status, research

question two elicited responses from the teachers regarding their opinions and beliefs

about various cultural products that aligned with different race and ethnicities. I asked the

teachers several questions about their perceptions of the multiple products that are created

as a reflection of the cultural and political milieu of society.

Most of the teachers provided socially desirable answers. They provided answers

that were politically correct.

Teacher 1: I'll give you one that I watch on PBS that's not on regular television, but I will say that I get a lot of information for my students now. It's an old show called Reading Rainbow, and it's excellent. I would like to bring it back into my classroom.

Reading Rainbow is a show where episodes centered on a theme from a book, or other children's literature, which was explored through several segments or stories. The show also recommended books for kids to look for when they went to the library. It is the third-longest running children's series in PBS history. This show provided inspiration and confidence to learn and pursue the teacher's own interests. The show focused on teaching children that reading is cool and that kids can learn about some fun things through books. It encouraged girls as well as boys to love science and math. Reading Rainbow helped children understand that the world is a rich and complex place full of wonderfully diverse people. Reading Rainbow had a big impact on the formation of social conscience for many youngsters.

In a similar pattern, Teacher 3 provided an answer that helped to promote her image as an enlightened non-biased educator whose media choices were guided by what is best for her students:

Teacher 3: I like to read books about—I wouldn't say educational books—like books about people with disabilities. There's a book called The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, and it's written from the perspective of a boy who has autism.

The book is about a fifteen-year-old boy who describes himself as a mathematician with some behavioral difficulties. The book allows for the reader to have a

greater appreciation of their own ability to feel, express, and interpret emotions. This book teaches about emotional life. It's a is a story of how an undeniably quirky teenage boy clings to order, deals with a family crisis, and tries to make sense of the world as he sees it, but it also provides profound insight into a disorder—autism—that leaves those who have it struggling to perceive even the most basic of human emotions.

Teacher 2 also spoke about choosing media that would benefit her students:

Teacher 2: I'm drawn to—probably not consciously—but I'm drawn to more movies, stories, books, where it's more character building. Generally, those come into a child who may feel differently because they're a minority, feel differently because they're a special needs student, feel differently because of their gender or feel differently, feel ostracized because of their height, their weight, their whatever.

Summary

My interviews with the teachers provided rich data that addressed my research questions and provided several themes regarding elementary teachers' attitudes and their criteria for identifying students in need of special education services. In response to the first research question, the following theme emerged involving the use of school policies. There are certain elements that are commonly found across all the schools sampled; however, the discrepancy is shown when interpreting rubrics and on the student evaluation on how their work is interpreted.

For research question two, the theme focused on the use of school staff. School policies are effective; however, the implementation is where interpretation and bias come through from teachers' prior knowledge of their student population.

In response to research question three, one theme emerged involving the use of instructional policies. Formal assessments tend to be the standard for assessment determination, whereas in class, formative teacher made tests are not as valued.

In response to research question four, two themes emerged. The first theme involved uncertainty about the RTI process. There was concern about whether RTI would be the only method used for identifying students' learning disability. There were also concerns about the teachers' own level of training and resources to implement it appropriately. The second theme focused on optimism about RTI. Teachers at the onset of implementing the program were optimistic as it gave them a plan and increased accountability, providing qualitative evidence in their decision-making process. The tiered process promoted collaboration with teachers on a regular timeline.

The fifth research question elicited responses in three thematic areas. The first theme involved the discomfort of teachers in discussing stereotypes. There was a hesitancy to divulge information about possible cultural biases in decision-making processes of special education classification and about their effects on both underachieving students (who are typically the minority and English language learners) and their peers.

The second theme focused on their views regarding socioeconomic status. Some teachers recognized that there were psychological, social, and institutional barriers to

parent involvement. Parents that are typically more involved have higher achieving students.

The third theme reflects their opinions on cultural products. Teachers did not want to be seen as being biased and gave answers that reflected an enlightened non-biased educator. Inclusion of cultural days, discussions, and media reflected this; however, that is not sufficient to mitigate teacher bias towards student achievement.

Having gathered all this data, it is clear that evaluating students often helps with student placement. Being in a special education class should not be a life sentence but a temporary placement; it is important to be able to close that loop and be reinserted into a normal classroom. Unfortunately, current policies do not show this, with students staying in these special education classes for the duration of their education. This reflects a lack of targeted approach, resources, and time. Is this caused by lack of parent involvement, teacher bias or school policy?

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions and attitudes of teachers regarding student placement in special education programs, using a sample of teachers from two elementary schools with special education student representation proportional to the racial composition of the student body population. Specifically, this study focused on Black male student placements in special education and the protocols used to identify those placements. Teachers were asked to describe their attitudes towards Parental Involvement, Interpretation of Ethnic Diversity, Stereotypes, Social Status, Racial Prejudice, and Instructional Practices in grades K-3.

Implications of Findings

This research showed the over-referral of Black males in Special Education based bias assessments in the classrooms, unconscious biases of interpretation of tests; biases in RTI processes; and the lack of ethnic diversity and stereotypes. This reflects previous studies indicating that the current system fosters an incorrect and stifling experience for children and families of children in need of special education services, suggesting that special education services are for those with weaknesses. This disproportionally impacts minority groups (Patton, 1998).

This study investigated teachers and assessment biases that have a greater impact on Black boys, leading to the observed disparities. This research intended to study students who are more subject to school failure because their home environments do not engage in the necessary intellectual interactions leading to the development of cognitive

skills appropriate for academic achievement. The proposed shortcomings of Black boy students do not stop with parents but extend beyond the individual home to the entire community**.** This corresponds with an earlier study conducted by Capper (2019), indicating that within the functional structuralism perspective prevalent in education today, the child or their family are blamed for negative outcomes since they are considered to operate outside of White norms. Differences in learning style, self-identity, language, and economic resources are systematically marginalized.

Research has shown that teacher attitudes and the expectations of educators and administrators play a vital role in determining students' academic success or failure (Jacobson, 2000). The attitudes and expectations professionals maintain about their students' current performance and motivation influence the future of Black boys in special education. The relationship between student and teacher is a vital one for many students of color. For several children, learning is a collective process, characterized by a genuine need to view learning experiences from a broad context, enabling them to make connections between content and the environment (Gay, 2004). If teachers espouse a tentative or negative attitude about a student's potential, it is possible that the student senses this and underperforms. The combined factors of bias, attitude, and expectations can affect the decision-making process regarding objective measures of genuine learning needs.

The key findings for how K-3 teachers identify students with special needs and refer these students to the Committee of Special Education was that they are completed by implementing school policies and collaborating with educational staff. The findings mirrored a study conducted by Shippen et al. (2009) indicating that school personnel

requested additional job training to update their knowledge base and improve their abilities to properly perform the assessment/referral/intervention practices associated with the special education process. There are instances when a teacher's own biases can affect and impact a student's placement such as appropriate policies and rubrics in place. A student can potentially be inaccurately placed due to a teacher's interpretation. This affirmed research (Sullivan et al., 2015) which indicated that these biases potentially lead teachers (and administrators) in classrooms to assess Black students differently and special education placement may be a result. Rynders (2019) identified these results as (a) over-referral of minority students for special education; (b) biased assessment processes in the classroom; (c) biased interpretation of standardized assessments; (d) differential application of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process; and (e) the impact of perceived stereotypes in decision-making.

Another key finding was the referral of students for special education based on evaluation of their writing and the evaluation criterion around this core competency. A clear pattern that emerged was students who are a behavioral challenge combined with a writing deficit and low math scores are almost guaranteed to be referred to a special education program. Previous research conducted by Anderson (2018) found that not only is there a gap in reading and math scores when Black and White students are compared, but Black students are more likely to be sent to another classroom or school for behavioral problems. As a result, students sent to a different classroom or school for behavioral problems were being placed in a more restrictive classroom environment (Special Education classes/schools). The only exception to this pathway is when the parents vocally advocated for their child to remain in the classroom. Adkison-Bradley et

al., (2006) indicated that parental involvement, or lack thereof, is also an important factor in appropriate placement in special education services that is to some extent influenced by the role of school counselors. School counselors can facilitate relationships with families to ascertain the level of involvement typical for a specific family, and the desire for achievement put forth within the home.

Formal assessments tend to be the standard for assessment determination as state testing is standardized and quantified; however, since the growing trend of parents opting out of their students taking standardized tests, this makes it more challenging for teachers to have quantified tests to use as benchmarks, opening the process to more subjective interpretations. This reflects Patton's (1998) research which discussed need for a paradigm shift to change the connotations around special education and Blacks and to encourage cultural acceptance of students in need of special education services. The current system fosters an incorrect and stifling experience for children and families of children in need of special education services, suggesting that special education services are for those with weaknesses. The new paradigm would reflect a sense of hope, and true liberation, and would allow special education students to develop and grow. To achieve this paradigm shift, it is imperative for the Black community to get involved.

There are additional points in the RTI process during which students who are suspected of having a learning disability are referred for a formal evaluation. Chu, (2011) identified that teacher referral has been cited as the most significant factor to examine regarding special education. The perception that teachers have in relation to a specific student can greatly influence an incorrect referral. The inappropriate diagnosis of students

with different race, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds bring up the question of disability as compared with diversity.

A clear pattern that emerged was that teachers disliked the RTI process due to a lack of time to do everything within the work hours, and teachers knew they were more accountable but lacked sufficient knowledge and skills to implement RTI. Some teachers more apprehensive to collaborate with other teachers caused some general teachers to worry about implementing interventions and how to best collaborate with education teachers. Teachers become overwhelmed with the RTI process. These findings corroborate the research of Shippen et al. (2009) indicating that there is a consensus that the assessment and referral process should be updated and restructured in order to effect change. Training for staff regarding cultural bias and working with a diverse population was also discussed as highly valued.

Relationship to Prior Research

The results of the study confirmed that ethnic diversity and the perceived stereotypes of teachers influence the special education decision-making process. The results also confirmed that classroom interactions between students, parents, and teachers influence these perceptions. This is corroborated by Sullivan's (2017) study which discussed the matter in the context of disproportionality in the area of categorization of emotional disturbance on the conceptual, psychometric, procedural, and causal issues related to overrepresentation of African American males in this category. These findings also confirmed Marsh and Noguera's (2019) research that indicated negative teacher perceptions continue to be observed, as reported in their study of African American male

students in a "no excuses" charter school that was designed for that population. Teachers often criticized students for exhibiting behaviors that were considered impolite and treated masculinity as deviant. Their perceptions were based on stereotypes of Black males as drawn to criminality and gangs and therefore in need of harsh disciplinary actions for infractions.

These discussions about diversity and stereotypes were challenging. Very often, they created tension and discomfort among the participants. We should consider the importance of getting comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. That idea may seem counterintuitive, but it is critical that we do so if we are to create equitable classroom interactions between students, and teachers.

Discomfort is something to be embraced. It is a sign of personal development and self-growth. Discomfort guides us to emotionally grow so we can engage with the things that make us feel uncomfortable. It is empowering to own your guilt, sadness, fear, or awkwardness so you can begin taking action.

The responses obtained from teachers in response to diversity and stereotypes not only displayed discomfort with the topic but also revealed teachers who are culturally responsive and proficient, and perhaps diverse themselves, who can help address racial disparities in student achievement.

Interview questions that connected with socioeconomic status and parent involvement demonstrated that the study's participants recognized that there were psychological, social, and institutional barriers to parent involvement. Parents that are typically more involved have higher achieving students. Having more parental involvement and a partnership with the school was needed for successful school

performance. This finding reflected the study of Shippen et al. (2009), indicating that special education teachers also felt that parental involvement played a large role in the learning process. Little to no parental involvement often resulted in students with difficulty appreciating, accepting, and thriving during the learning process.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are threefold: focusing on subject bias, self-selection bias, and sample size. Subject bias is a common limitation with qualitative research.

As this data was collected by me, within a school system of my peers that I know and work with, it is possible that the answers I received were a popular answer that colleagues wanted to give me rather than an honest opinion. This can negatively influence the outcome of the study. Self-selection bias is an influence in this research since I selected the teachers for interview rather than a random selection process. Additionally, all the participants were female. If a male had participated in the study, the findings could have changed. Acknowledging this limitation means results could be affected by a personal bias of the researcher when selecting the subject group. Another research limitation in this qualitative study is the small sample size potentially affecting the reliability of the study. The sample size can be insufficient due to a limited number of participants and diversity of responses. Additionally, the demographic breakdown varied between the urban and suburban school settings.

Recommendations for Future Practice

K-3 teachers are supported and can best successfully identify students with special needs and refer these students to the Committee on Special Education when they

are in schools with strong and effective leadership. These schools have a clear mission statement, an emphasis on classroom instruction, as well as involved family and community members in the educational enterprise. Moreover, school districts with a diverse teacher workforce provide many benefits to African American students.

Considering this research, teachers should be required to develop and document their use of a pre-placement intervention before any child is placed in special education. This would include differentiated and culturally diversified instruction and behavior management strategies that are implemented for a period of time before a child is referred for testing, classified, and placed into special education.

A body of research (Fine & Weis, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Tatum, 1997) has shown an ever-increasing number of Black males are not learning the essentials of literacy—mathematics, history, geography, and science—nor are they learning to be critical thinkers. They are far too frequently negatively impacted by teachers and placed in situations damaging to their psychological development, in large part due to the "Eurocentric curriculum that does not connect with their historical and sociocultural experiences" (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008), and an overall lack of engagement with curricula (Muhammad, 2016). Thus, African American male students are often not effectively educated because they are not fully engaged with the curriculum (Anderson, 2018), despite emerging research indicating an increased potential "to overcome adversity and utilize positive youth development assets and resources" (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). These reports, along with others (Eitle, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004) suggest that future research assess the problem on a smaller scale. Specifically, the recommendations from these studies involve identifying additional

perspectives from teachers, administrators, and families to better clarify variables involved in and find solutions for the disproportionate representation of minority children in special education.

Teachers must be trained to adjust their pedagogical strategies for culturally and ethnically different students. Multicultural curricula are needed to be responsive to the needs of diverse students. Culturally responsive pedagogy involves teaching that embraces diversity, develops respectful relationships, affirms cultural identities, and displays genuine concern.

Teachers must recognize that positive teacher-student relationships are beneficial for student achievement and reducing special education referrals. Families and schools should form partnerships to benefit children. Parents, community leaders, and school personnel should collaborate to improve achievement and reduce behavior problems.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers should evaluate the content within the RTI to determine whether its data collection and holistic implementation are appropriate. Alignment of how teachers evaluate students and next step implementation education progression are relevant; however, it is important to acknowledge that the outcomes of RTI implementation will vary on several key factors, such as selection and fidelity of interventions, decisions about time frames, criteria for movement among tiers, resources, and staff training. Having a framework that can adjust for these variables within school will allow for a more accurate assessment and placement of students.

Research should focus on the effectiveness of RTI in relation to overall student success. Additionally, research should focus on the impact or difference of student engagement by incorporating CRT within a special education setting. Research should likewise focus on the impact of parent involvement on student achievement and on the impact of cultural diversity training for parents within the community.

Undertaking this research has shed further light on the importance of the placement of K-3 minority students (Black boys) in special education programs. It has found that there is continued bias in how students are placed based upon parental involvement, socioeconomic status, and teacher perception. Being placed in special education has lifelong implications for students. For those who need it, they receive the learning support to succeed and eventually move into regular education classes. For those wrongly enrolled, they are at a massive disadvantage affecting graduation rates that can follow these individuals into adulthood. The disproportionate number of African American students in special education creates a stigma for the student and their families. Ongoing support and leadership within schools is important to provide teachers with the resources they need to make accurate and timely evaluation, ensuring these students a successful future

Conclusion

This study revealed parents who become overwhelmed and have limited financial resources are placed in stressful situations, which in turn leads to less parental involvement and less time provided to help the student perform well in school. In

addition, when funds are limited, fewer resources are available for students such as extracurricular programs.

Having gathered all this data, I know that evaluating students often helps with student placement. Being in a special education class should not be a life sentence but a temporary placement; it is important to be able to close that loop and be reinserted into a normal classroom. Unfortunately, current policies do not show this, with students staying in these special education classes for the duration of their education. This reflects a lack of targeted approach, and time. reveals lack of parent involvement, teacher bias, and school policy that increase the placement of students in special education classes.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL MEMO

DOWLING COLLEGE
Institutional Review Board

To:	**Ms. Geraldine Maurice**
From:	**Dr. Michael Walker**
Contact Info:	walkerm@dowling.edu or 631-244-3094
Date:	**June 23, 2014**
Re:	Review of Human Subject Research

Project's Title: Elementary School Teacher's Attitudes and Criteria for Special Education Services

_____

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects of Dowling College has approved your project with the following provisions:

a.   This approval is for one year, **starting 06/23/2014** and **ending 06/22/2015**. If you wish to conduct research beyond this period of time, you'll need to fill out the **IRB Continuing Research Progress Report** form. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have an approved protocol at all times during your research.

b.   Approved consent form(s) must be used by all subjects. You are responsible for maintaining signed consent form(s) for a period of at least three years.

c.   All modifications and/or changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

d.   All adverse events as a result of this research must be reported to the IRB at the time of occurrence.

e.   All principal investigators and other key research personnel have on file with the IRB their **Computer-Based Training (CBT) Certificates (i.e., IRB Course Completion Certificates)**.

Good luck with your work!

Michael Walker
IRB Chair

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Tell me a little bit about your building and district.

1. How do you make decisions with regard to student referral for special education services?

2. Does parental involvement in your classroom provide any benefit to you?

   a. Does parental involvement allow you to further interact with more students?

   b. Does parental involvement allow students to engage in more activities?

3. Is parental involvement useful in special education classrooms?

   a. Does parental involvement engage the students or create more difficulty in the classroom?

   b. Does parental involvement alter the functionality of the classroom?

4. How have you requested parental involvement in your class?

   a. Do you send regular newsletters home with the students to encourage parental involvement?

   b. Do parents receive phone calls or emails from you encouraging classroom participation and volunteers?

5. How have you invited parental involvement in your class?

a. Are parents encouraged to volunteer with class activities during school hours?

b. Do parents organize student activities during school hours?

c. Are parents encouraged to volunteer as part of your curriculum for your students?

6. What role does faculty diversity play in student learning?

7. What role does student diversity play in classroom learning?

8. How are classrooms with both diverse faculty and student presence more engaged?

a. Could you describe what the engagement looks like?

b. What are teachers doing and how are students responding to what teachers are doing?

9. Are classrooms with both diverse faculty and student supportive of greater student academic success?

10. What cultural stereotypes regarding race or culture have you seen at play in your assessment of special needs students?

a. Can you describe your view of the influences of mass media, including television, magazines, and radio (for example), on special needs student success?

b. Are there particular television shows, music genres, or books/printed materials that you deliberately view?

c. Are there particular television shows, music genres, or books/printed materials that you intentionally avoid?

11. Do you think there is an association between social status, and specifically socioeconomic status and the success of minority students? How would you describe the relationships between socioeconomic status and minority student academic success?

12. Do you think there is an association between social status, and specifically socioeconomic status and the academic success of special education students? Are individuals who live in impoverished conditions more likely to become special education students? If so, why? If not, why do you believe there is an association between economic conditions and students' academic performance?

13. Is there evidence of racial prejudice in your school? If so, what does it look like? If not, what is your thinking about individuals who suggest there is racial prejudice in your school?

14. Is there evidence of gender prejudice in your school? When you observe teacher-student interactions, how are the interactions that you observe?

15. Do the teachers of grades K-3 adapt their teaching styles to reflect and incorporate cultural differences in the student body? What techniques do these teachers use to bring awareness to cultural differences in the student population? What are the learning outcomes based on teachers adapting their styles?

16. What cultural norms of your own culture are common between you and your

   students?

   a. Do you think your students' families engage in comparable media sources as you

   do?

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Other Degrees and Certificates	*Stony Brook University, School District Administration, earned Advanced Graduate Certificate, Fall 2004.*
	Queens College, CUNY, July 1998 to August 2000. Received M.S. Ed. degree. NYS Certification granted September 2000: General and Special Education.