

BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING
OVERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my beloved mother, Fannie May Jauhari.

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ABSTRACT

BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING OVERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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George Mason University, 2014

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This qualitative study investigated Black early childhood teachers' perspectives regarding overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities. In a semi-structured interview with teachers (n=9), participants responded to open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of overrepresentation as well as solutions to eliminate overrepresentation. Several themes emerged: knowledge of self, student evaluations, parent support, and teacher advocacy. The teachers concluded the following: (a) it is important for them to instill positive and healthy racial identity in Black students, (b) evaluators must use culturally competent evaluation methods for evaluating students for special education placement, (c) parents need to be involved in their children's academic progress, and (d) teachers should advocate against special

education placement for students who are inappropriately evaluated. In addition, the teachers believed that educators and parents must address issues and challenges facing overrepresentation so they can implement solutions to eliminate overrepresentation. Suggested solutions included (a) involvement of parents, (b) training and resources for parents, (c) teachers communicating and connecting with families, (d) teachers advocating on behalf of students, and (e) creating cultural competent evaluations. Suggestions for future research regarding Black early childhood students in special education programs included further investigation on how overrepresentation is perceived by parents, students, and teachers as well as investigating what solutions should be implemented to eliminate overrepresentation for Black students with mild disabilities.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter explores my interest in and experiences working with Black students in special education. I examine the problem of overrepresentation of Black students with mild disabilities within early childhood special education programs. I provide examples of academic performances and discriminatory disciplinary practices that Black children experience as a result of their special educational placement. For the background of the problem, I discuss several major special education laws that impacted children with disabilities. When addressing my theoretical framework, critical race theory is used to address this overrepresentation within the context of racism and social justice advocacy.

Furthermore, I discuss the purpose and significance of the study, having decided to conduct a qualitative study that examines Black teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation in early childhood education. Then, I present my guiding research questions that enable me to better understand Black teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation. Finally, I explain critical definitions that are utilized throughout my study.

Self-Instrument

Within this study, I see myself as a research instrument. Although I have conducted an extensive literature review, my personal experiences have led me to examine the overrepresentation of Black students. For over 15 years, I have worked

intensively with Black children, from prekindergarten through 12th grade, who have participated in the special education system. I have also served as a role model by providing cultural-competence training for teachers, principals, counselors, and other educators teaching Black children in special education.

During my freshman year, my mentor, Dr. Michael Davis, told me that I should become a teacher. He said that Black students need to be taught by Black teachers. Dr. Davis provided me with a rich knowledge of Black history. He was the first person to teach me about multicultural education, special education, and critical race theory. Thus, I began my journey to examine the impact that special education had on Black students.

My first professional job started in my junior year of college. I was a counselor for a residential treatment facility. The residential treatment facility was a mental health facility for children who were abused or neglected or children who inflicted harm to themselves or others. Because this was a 24-hour residential treatment facility, students had to attend the on-site Day Treatment School. Although most of the students were Black, the teachers and counselors were not. Relating to the Black students appeared to be difficult for the White teachers. The students complained that these teachers made negative racial comments about their way of talking and way of dressing. The teachers complained that the students always asked questions about Black history, which these white teachers knew little about. Because the teachers wanted to provide culturally relevant materials within the curriculum, they asked me to assist them with establishing multicultural curriculum and teacher training.

After finishing my undergraduate degree, I worked as a counselor at a juvenile correctional facility. The teachers there were extremely frustrated. The Black students called them racist. Although the teachers acknowledge their lack of knowledge and skills for providing culturally relevant information to the children about Black history and traditions, they were also beginning to form negative biases toward the students. Some teachers admitted that not only did they have difficulties working with Black children, but they were also questioning if they should work with Black children in the future.

After several years at the juvenile correctional facility, I left to start work as a program director for a Black nonprofit organization. One of my duties was to provide multicultural education training to teachers at their elementary day treatment program. All of the Black and White teachers struggled with providing African-centered instructional approaches for Black children. The teachers had a lot of behavior management problems with the students, which often resulted in the physical restraint of these children. Again, the teachers formulated negative attitudes and perceptions about the students.

My experiences have shown me that these teachers were not equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide effective educational practices to promote Black students' learning. The teachers did not understand the value and importance of teaching from a culturally specific and relevant perspective. The teachers found it difficult to incorporate a true multicultural approach with examples that included Black culture. It was also evident that the students lacked a sense of cultural pride and self-worth. Many of the Black students used profanity, made racial slurs about Black

culture, and portrayed themselves as if they were “thugs.” At the same time, the teachers’ lack of knowledge and skills to address positive instructions about culturally appropriate behavior, knowledge, pride, and self-respect led Black students to continue to consciously and/or unconsciously reinforce negative cultural stereotypes. I have noticed this trend when working with most teachers, Black or White, throughout my work within the special education system.

It is disheartening to notice that some teachers lack the proper knowledge, skills, and abilities that would help them to work effectively with a Black population. Moreover, it is frustrating to hear teachers’ negative comments about Black students. I have known many teachers who have made negative comments about Black students, referring them to special education programs because the teachers believed that they could not “control” the students’ behavior. Therefore, from my experience and my research, I am not surprised that Black students are overrepresented in special education. My goal, thus, is to guide Black teachers to a higher level of consciousness as they embark on a journey to help support and properly invest in Black students within special education programs.

I am a proud Black man who is on a spiritual journey in life-seeking liberation and salvation for Black people. I want Black people to master the knowledge of themselves and utilize that knowledge to challenge the oppressive structures and people that cause us harm. In addition, I want Black people to help themselves embrace the greatness of our African cultural/identity.

Statement of the Problem

For over 40 years, there has been an abundance of research that critically examined the overrepresentation of Black children in special education programs (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Dunn, 1968; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005; Krezimen, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Kunjufu, 2001; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006). Many of the Black students in special education programs have been identified as having mild disabilities, but their representation in special education is at a higher rate than the given proportion of the general school-age population (Dunn, 1968; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005). One major way to calculate the overrepresentation is to use the composition index measure. The composition index compares the proportion of students represented by a specific ethnic group in special education with the proportion of those students in the broader population (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). For example, if a group is represented in a particular category at a rate of 10% or higher than their representation in a particular population, they are considered to be overrepresented in that category (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

The majority of the research that has examined overrepresentation in early childhood special education has focused on Black students in kindergarten through 12th grade (Delgado & Scott, 2006; Ford, 2012). Very few studies have addressed overrepresentation for preschool age children (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga,

2012). A report by the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (2001) revealed that Children of Color (birth to 3 years) entering early services were heavily represented in early childhood special education. In some cases, the students in special education had been diagnosed with a speech disorder because of their challenges with language performance in understanding Standard English (Thomas-Tate, Washington, & Edwards, 2004). In addition, Black students are also over-diagnosed with emotional disturbance disorder in special education programs (Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005). In the fall of 2011, 9.1% of Black students compared to 6.5% of White students were categorized as having an emotional disturbance disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Educators' disciplinary procedures for Black students within special education have resulted in major consequences for these students (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Archilles, McLaughlin, and Croniner (2007) concluded that these disciplinary procedures disproportionately affect students with disabilities, despite the protections afforded to them under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990. Overrepresentation of Black students has contributed to how educators utilize various forms of disciplinary practices for Black students, which resulted in Black students being disproportionately suspended or expelled (Archilles, McLaughlin, & Croniner, 2007; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Krezimen, Leone, & Achilles, 2006).

Rashid (2009) discussed how Black boys emerge from preschool through third grade and into fourth grade with "the lowest reading levels; the lowest expectations of teachers; and the highest suspension, expulsion, and special education referral rates of

any group of children in the United States” (p. 347). Despite the lack of evidence that Black children display higher levels of disruptive behavior, they are suspended or expelled at rates two to three times higher than other ethnic peer groups. According to the U.S. Department Office for Civil Rights’ (2014) collected data from 2011-2012, Black students with disabilities were suspended at rates of 27% for boys and 19% for girls compared with White students with disabilities with the rates of 12% for boys and 6% for girls (of Americans in special education between the ages of six- through nine-years-old had suspension and expulsion at rates of 28% compared to 13% for Hispanics and 10% for Caucasians)

Artiles and Bal (2008) noted that Students of Color receive more restricted services than White students, even though both groups may share the same disability diagnosis. Skiba et al. (2006) gathered and analyzed data from the Indiana public school system to address whether Black students were disproportionately represented in both general education classes and separate class settings. They concluded that while Black students comprised 23.2% of the total emotional disturbance population, they represented 14.2% of the students with emotional disturbance in general education classrooms. In addition, 26.2% of Black students were found in separate classrooms. Thus, Black students were 1.2 times more likely to be placed in separate classrooms and 50% less likely to be placed in general education classrooms than their peers.

According to the Thirty-Fifth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 54.6% percent of Black students spend 80% or more of their day inside a general education classroom compared to 64.3% of

White students. In addition, 18.5% of Black students spend less than 40% of their day inside a general education classroom compared to 11.1% of White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Krezimen, Leone, and Achilles (2006) conducted a statewide analysis of suspension data from 1995 to 2003 in Maryland. The results indicated that Black students were three times at risk for suspension than any other ethnic group. Even with the controlling of socioeconomic factors, Black students received more suspensions than White students (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Krezimen, Leone, & Achilles, 2006). Furthermore, the consequences of overrepresentation placed limitations on Black students from having the opportunity to have access to mainstream curriculum and resources, thus, resulting in them spending more than 60% of their day outside of general educational classes (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006).

The impact of the results of unfair disciplinary practices by educators has been examined by researchers regarding the future of Black students in relation to the prison complex. Rashid (2009) brought attention to the concept of preschool to prison pipeline: “It runs from preschool settings through elementary and middle schools, into the high schools from which young African American men continue to drop out in staggering numbers, and ultimately into federal and state prisons” (p. 329). This concept of the pipeline to prison has led me to realize that there is a need to study overrepresentation of young Black children in special education.

Background of the Problem

The creation of special education programs was systematically designed to meet the educational needs of young children with disabilities (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 1999). According to Boone and King-Berry (2007), students with disabilities were discriminated against and treated unfairly within the schools they attended. Some of the children were segregated in separate facilities in the school building that were unfit for educational learning (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). Based on some of the discrimination practices that were placed on children with disabilities, several laws were established by the federal government to address the inadequate services and unfair treatment children with disabilities experienced.

Special Education Laws

Given the purpose of this study, several special education laws were briefly reviewed. Boone and King-Berry (2007) noted that the federal government mandated several laws to provide adequate resources and support to children with disabilities. Several of these laws are 1) the Education for Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, 2) Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1971, 3) Mills v. Board of Education of 1972, 4) the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 5) Section 504, All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and 6) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1990.

As a part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society Program, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 came into law. This law was created to address poverty issues within the United States. One of the programs established under this law was the Head

Start program. The Head Start program was designed to offer low-income preschool children, with or without a disability, a variety of programs so they could be better equipped for kindergarten (Genishi & Goodwin, 2008). In relation to this study, Head Start included children with disabilities from its inception.

In Pennsylvania, it was legal for the Board of Education to exclude children with disabilities from being educated if the public school psychologist deemed them uneducable and untrainable (LaNear & Frarrura, 2007). In turn, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in 1971, brought forth a class action suit on behalf of people with disabilities, ages of 6 to 21, who had been excluded from the public schools (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). The results of the court's decision guaranteed special education to people with disabilities, set the terms from which education should take place, and established federal control over which children should be educated (Boone & King-Berry, 2007).

Mills v. Board of Education was a lawsuit brought against the Mayor, the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the District of Columbia on behalf of children who had been excluded from public schools in the District of Columbia after they had been classified as having hyperactivity, emotional disturbance, behavior problems, or mental retardation (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). The court ruled that each child in the District of Columbia, regardless of the severity of disability, must have the right to a hearing chaired by an impartial hearing officer, must have the right to written notification about the special education process, must be provided a free education, must be evaluated by public

or private agencies in order to ensure suitable placement, and must have the right to appeal decisions made by the school (Boone & King-Berry, 2007).

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 prohibited discrimination on the basis of one's disability in any program or activity receiving or benefits from federal financial services (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Boone & King-Berry, 2007; Welner, 2006). In 1975, Congress passed and President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which governs how students with disabilities will be educated and offers funding assistance to states in their efforts to provide these children with special education and related services (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Boone & King-Berry 2007). Also, this law entitles students with disabilities to an individual educational program (IEP) (LaNear & Frarrura, 2007).

Finally, the most extensive piece of legislation that provided educational services and opportunities for students with disabilities was with the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Act 1990 (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 added autism and traumatic brain injury as categories of disability. In addition, it expanded the definition of related services to include rehabilitation counseling and social work services (LaNear & Frarrura 2007). Although these major legislations were significant with offering services and opportunities for students with disabilities, Students of Color continued to be discriminated against in special education programs (Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002).

Despite the intentions of the laws, Students of Color continue to be overrepresented in special education programs (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Coutinho & Oswald,

2000; Dunn, 1968; Neal, McCray, & Webb-Johnson, 2001; Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009; Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002). Specifically, Black students continue to be disproportionately overrepresented in special education (Neal, McCray, & Webb-Johnson, 2001), especially within subjective disability categories (i.e., learning disabilities, mild mental disabilities, and emotional disturbance) (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009). Based on this research, I decided to explore overrepresentation in education through the theoretical lens of critical race theory. Critical race theory is a framework that has been utilized to address racial oppression within education (Taylor, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory is rooted in a cultural context of empowerment, for challenging racial oppression and discrimination. It has been used to contest issues from a legal perspective, exposing racial inequality and legal injustices (Taylor, 2006). More so, critical race theory examines how the ruling elites use their power to keep other groups of people from accessing power (Lynn, 2006; Taylor, 2006). Lynn (2006) wrote that critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is a natural and necessary part of a society, which is founded on White supremacist principles. In addition, White people do not allow any significant progress for racially subordinated groups to occur unless they are, in some way, served by it (Lynn, 2006). Taylor (2006) reminded us that critical race theory “grounds racial problems in race-specific language in order to define and utilize ideologies free of the racial hierarchies that have defined much of U.S. history, politics,

and educational systems” (p. 72). Furthermore, Taylor (2006) noted that there are several elements to critical race theory:

1. Racism is a normal fact of daily life in American society and that the assumptions of White superiority are ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures.
2. Narrative is to redirect the dominant gaze, to make it see from a new point of view what has been there all along.
3. Historical context focuses on a common discussion on race as a tendency not to disregard the historical conflict.
4. Interest convergence is the interest of Blacks in gaining racial equality, which has been accommodated only when they have converged with the interests of powerful Whites.
5. Permanent is periods of seeming progress followed by periods of resistance and backlash as societal forces reassert majority dominance.

When examining critical race theory as it applies to education, Watkins (2001) argued that the intent of the schooling practices in White supremacist contexts has always been to serve and further support the unequal system of privilege conferred upon White people. Solorzano and Tosso (2000) concluded that critical race theory in education is an important approach that is used to understand and eliminate racial problems in education through the lens of People of Color. Because of the essential solidarity that Black

teachers have with Black students (Dickar, 2008), it is important for Black teachers' voices be heard as they address the overrepresentation of Black students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, using qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach, was to investigate Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives regarding the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs for mild disabilities. A semi-structured interview was used to examine Black teachers' self-perceptions and their beliefs about overrepresentation of Black children with mild disabilities in special education programs. Participants were recruited from Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia schools.

Despite an extensive search of the literature, there are a limited number of studies that address educators' and families' perspectives of overrepresentation of Black children in special education for mild disabilities (Shippen, Curtis, & Miller, 2009; William, 2007). Although some of the studies included Black teachers and their perspectives of overrepresentation, none of the studies examined the perspectives of Black early childhood teachers as they related to the overrepresentation of Black students with mild disabilities in special education programs.

Because teachers are the primary referral for assessing students with mild disabilities within the educational system (Moore, 2002), it is vital to understand Black teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation of Black students within special education. Milner (2008) noted that successful teachers

come to know themselves culturally, linguistically, gendered, racially, economically, and socially in relation to others; speak possibility and not destruction both inside and outside of the classroom regarding their students; care and demonstrate that care; and change their negative, deficit, counterproductive thinking in order to change their actions in the classroom with students. (p. 1574)

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to understand the perspectives of Black early childhood teachers regarding overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs. Because research has not adequately addressed overrepresentation solely from the voices of Black early childhood teachers, it is vital for Black early childhood teachers to inform the world of their own cultural perspectives and identity as it relates to addressing overrepresentation. As it relates to Black teachers, Moore (2002) stated, “it is important that they be solicited to tell their stories, share their perspectives, thoughts, ideas, as well as have the opportunity to express themselves through their collective and individual ways of knowing” (p. 634). This study can be used to help educators, researchers, families, and policy makers generate understanding as well as solutions that can help better address and eliminate overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. What are Black early childhood education teachers' perceptions of overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities?
2. What solutions do Black early childhood teachers believe need to occur in order to eliminate the overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities?

Definitions of Terms

African psychology: the positive features of basic African philosophy, which dictates the values, customs, attitudes, and behaviors of Africans in Africa and the New World (Nobles, 2004).

Black people or African American: people who identify with Black culture as their ethnic identity.

Categories of Disabilities: There are 13 categories defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These categories are as follows: developmental delay, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, autism, other health impairments, intellectual disabilities, speech or language impairments, hearing impairments (including deafness), visual impairments (including blindness), multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, deaf-blindness, and specific learning disabilities.

Composition index: compares the proportion of those served in special education represented by a specific ethnic group with the proportion in the broader population (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006).

Critical race theory: a theoretical framework for addressing issues from a legal perspective, exposing racial inequality and legal injustices (Taylor, 2006).

Early Childhood: children who range in age from three to eight years old.

Overrepresentation: a certain group of students whose percentage is significantly higher than the percentage of the general population (Fenning & Rose 2007).

Racial socialization: the process of socializing children based on race relations (Caughy, Nettles, O'Campo, & Lohrfink, 2006).

Students of Color: people who do not identify their culture as solely of European descent.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Because I am interested in how Black teachers' understanding of racial identity influences their relationship with Black children who are overrepresented in special education programs, I examined the literature on racial identity. In this chapter, I present the research that examines ways Black children are socialized by their Black parents and how that socialization process influences their racial identity as they matriculate into adulthood. Then, I explore educators' perspective of teacher referral process of Black students. Finally, I present overall educators' and parents' perspective of overrepresentation of Black children in special education.

Black Racial Socialization and Identity

It is very important for Black teachers to understand how their racial socialization and identity influences their working relationships with Black students. By understanding their racial socialization and identity, Black teachers may create strategies for eliminating overrepresentation will as well as be able to provide viable outcomes to help other educators address the many challenges that face overrepresentation in early childhood.

Racial Socialization

Within the world, socialization is a naturally occurring event within a family's culture. Families play an essential role in their children's socialization. They pass on perspectives and behaviors that reflect their cultural values. Socialization helps families

guide their children through life, preparing them for positive and negative experiences; thus, their cultural group shapes children's beliefs, morals, norms, behaviors, goals, and values to conformity as they matriculate through adulthood (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008; Thomas & Speight, 1999). In addition, children learn to model and adapt some of their thoughts and behaviors from their families (Thomas, 2000). Because of racial oppression and discrimination, Black families have to focus their socialization process for their children based on race relations (Caughy, Nettles, O'Campo, & Lohrfink, 2006). Hence, racial socialization has now become an important child rearing practice for Black parents within the United States.

Caughy, Randolph, and O'Campo (2002) examined the association between parent racial socialization and child competence in a socioeconomically diverse sample of urban Black preschoolers. Interviews were conducted in the homes of 200 families. The results indicated that Black parents who provided homes that were rich in Black culture had preschool children who had greater amounts of factual knowledge and better developed problem-solving skills. Also, Black parents who socialized their preschool children to be proud of their heritage reported fewer behavioral problems.

Hughes and Chen (1997) explored child, parent, and ecological predictors of African American parent-child's communications regarding racial issues. Data were derived from structured interviews with 157 African American parents (aged 21-63 years old) with children (4-14 years old). There were three components of racial socialization that were explored: (a) teaching about African American culture, (b) preparing children for experiences with prejudice, and (c) promoting out-group mistrust. The findings

indicate that cultural socialization was more frequent than the preparation for racial bias, which was, in turn, more frequent than the promotion of mistrust.

Hughes and Johnson (2001) examined a quantitative study about the racial socialization processes amongst 94 African American parents (aged 26-56 years old) of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade children. The study explored children's experiences of multiple types of socialization, including the following: (a) teaching about their culture, history, and heritage; (b) emphasizing diversity and awareness of other groups; (c) preparing children for racial bias; and (d) issuing cautions or warnings about interactions with other groups. The results conclude that these parents focused on teaching their children about their cultural heritage rather than on preparing their children for racial bias or racial mistrust. Also, parents will discuss racial bias and promote mistrust if the parents perceive that their children have been treated unfairly by an adult because of their race.

Racial Identity

For Black teachers, racial identity places the life experience, history, and traditions of Black culture at the center point for them to understand who they are. By understanding these experiences, Black teachers will be able to examine various ways that their racial identity may impact their perspectives of overrepresentation of Black children in special education programs. Farrakhan (1993) stated, "It's imperative to teach people about themselves, their history, their bodies and their nature so that they can become self masters. Mastery of self is the key to mastery of all disciplines because in some way every discipline is present within ourselves" (p. 50). Because African

American students are overrepresented in special education, it is vital for early childhood teachers “to instill within them the commitment and ability to respond to the learning needs of every child in their classrooms, whether or not they share a culture (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, teachers who are conscious of their own cultural competence may become very committed to social justice and equity issues (Liang & Zhang, 2009). Therefore, the hope is that Black teachers will then begin to explore how their racial identity influences their thoughts, beliefs, and practices to address social justice and equality issues, especially for Black early childhood overrepresentation in special education programs.

The study of Black racial identity is rooted in African psychology. Nobles (2004) emphasized “African psychology is the positive features of basic African philosophy, which dictate the values, customs, attitudes, and behaviors of Africans in Africa and the New World” (p. 58). To further elaborate, Grills (2004) quotes the definition of African psychology, which was originally defined by the Association of Black Psychology as “the dynamic manifestation of unifying African principles, values, and traditions. It is the self-conscious centering of psychological analysis and application in African reality, culture, and epistemology. African-Centered psychology examines the process that allows for the illumination and liberation of the spirit” (p. 172). In essence, Black people must seek an internal understanding of themselves, so they can help improve their conditions and realities (Watt, 2006). Rowe and Webb-Msemaji (2004) inform us that African psychology provides the necessary tools to liberate the mental and spiritual consciousness of people of African descent. It is used to resolve personal and social

problems and promote optimal functioning. Therefore, African psychology focuses on defining psychological experiences from an African perspective, which reflects an African orientation to the meaning of life, the world, and relationships with others and one's self (Grills, 2004).

Helms (1990) defined racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). While examining racial identity, most of the original work on racial identity focused on Black racial identity (Freitas & McAuley, 2008). It is very important for Black people to understand how their racial identity shapes their attitudes and the decisions they make (Cross, 1991; Watt, 2006).

Black parents are very influential with helping their children develop and understand their racial identity (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes, Rodriguez, & Smith, 2006; McHale, Crouter, Kim, Burton, Davis, Dotterer, & Swanson, 2006; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Depending on the parents' racial identity development stage, the child may take on whatever stage of development their parents have (Thomas, 2000). For example, parents who have a strong positive racial identity will more likely socialize their children to have a positive and health racial identity (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008).

Thomas (2000) conducted a quantitative study with 104 parents ranging in age from 17- to 76-years-old. The study focused on the impact of racial identity attitudes on Black parents' child-rearing beliefs. The results indicated that parents who have pro-Black attitudes are more likely to demonstrate culturally affirming parenting. In addition,

parents who have negative attitudes about White people may teach their children to be suspicious and paranoid around White people.

Gregory and Mosley (2004) stated that teachers are now encouraged to understand their own racial identity. Some teachers are aware of how their racial identity impacts their relationship with students as well as helping them being able to address topics of social justice and equality (Lonnquist, RB-Banks, & Hurber, 2009). Thus, Black teachers need to understand how their racial socialization impacts their racial identity. Gay (2005) stated, “Teachers need to be conscious of their own cultural values and beliefs, and how these affect their attitudes and expectations toward students from different ethnic groups and how they are habitually exhibited in school behaviors” (p. 233). The concept of racial identity is a very important undertaking that Black teachers must face as they address their own perspectives on the impact that overrepresentation has had on Black children. Thus, their perspectives may enable them to provide strategies that will help educators to eliminate overrepresentation.

Overall Perspectives of Overrepresentation

There has been extensive research that has discussed how teachers’ referral process may impact overrepresentation (Mandell, Davis, Bevans, & Guevara, 2008; Moore, 2002; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). In addition, there has been a growing body of research that has addressed overall educators’ and parents’ perspective of overrepresentation of Black children in special education programs (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Dykes, 2008; Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005; Shippen, Curtis, & Miller, 2009; Thomas-Tate, Washington, & Edwards, 2004). Because

I am interested in investigating Black teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation of Black students, I briefly review the literature that addresses overrepresentation of Black students.

Perspectives of the Referral Process

There is a growing body of research examining teachers' referrals of Black students for special education (Bacon, Banks, Young, & Jackson, 2007; Cullinan & Kauffman, 2005; Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung, & Roach-Scott, 2009; Mandell, Davis, Bevans, & Guevara, 2008; Moore, 2002; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003) and how a teachers' referral process can lead to overrepresentation (Mandell, Davis, Bevans, & Guevara, 2008; Moore, 2002; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). Gardner and Miranda (2001) emphasize how the majority of the teachers are White middle-class women who graduated from a teacher preparation program and were not provided the necessary skills and knowledge to work with culturally diverse young learners in urban areas. Thus, the following sections address the increase of referrals of African Americans in special education.

Cullinan and Kauffman (2005) conducted a quantitative study that primarily focused on studying racial bias in educators' perceptions of emotional and behavioral problems involved in the characteristics of emotional disturbance. Black and White teachers, with a few exceptions of their counselors or schools psychologists, rated their own students. Seven hundred sixty-nine students participated in the study: 245 identified as African American and 524 identified as European American. The students were divided into three school levels: elementary (6-11 years of age), middle (12-14 years of

age), and high school (15-18 years of age). Black raters provided data on 82 students and White raters provided data on 687 students. The teachers rated African American and European American students with emotional disturbance. The Scale for Assessing Emotional Disturbance assessment tool was used to examine each student's emotional disturbance. The assessment consisted of five emotional disturbance sub-scale characteristics and social maladjustment. The results concluded that teachers' perceptions did not exhibit overall racial bias. Black educators rated Black elementary students higher on four out of six of the categories than White educator rates. Although there does not appear to be any racial bias, Black educators rated only 24 Black students while White educators rated 66 Black students.

Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) studied 136 middle school teachers from a suburban southwest school and who viewed videos of Black and White students engaging in different movement patterns. The study examined teachers' perceptions of African American males' achievement and aggression and the need for special education services based on cultural movement, such as styles of walking, standard, and stroll. Although one teacher declined to provide demographic data, only four of the teachers were African American. The results indicated that the teachers rated African American students' cultural movement styles as lower in achievement, higher in aggression, and more likely to receive special education services than students with standard movement styles.

Moore (2002) conducted a qualitative study using participant observation and interviewing techniques. The participants included 11 African American early childhood

education teachers in public schools. Five teachers taught prekindergarten, and six teachers taught kindergarten. Prior to conducting any formal observations or interviews, the participants were observed over the course of three weeks. Some were observed twice each week for two hours and others were observed once a week for four hours in the context of their classrooms and school environment. The interviews were conducted in two phases. First, teachers were interviewed within the first three weeks for approximately 90 minutes at their school or in their homes. They were interviewed again three weeks later during a brief follow-up meeting at a restaurant for approximately 15-30 minutes. The findings revealed that teachers who do not understand the criteria for special education referral or disability definitions may make inappropriate referral decisions. The findings also suggested that some teachers believe they do not possess the knowledge to assess student's disability or recognize one ability from another. Moore (2002) concluded that more professional training needs to focus on helping teachers better understand different disabilities. Also, most of the teachers held theoretical conceptions of their ideal student as female, fair, and average-to-very-mature, and their non-ideal difficult students were male, dark, African-American and expressing very immature to difficult mature behavior. The authors noted that these teachers' decisions about instruction and referral are rooted in Eurocentric learning and behavioral paradigms and places students at risk for early childhood referral.

Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) discussed a focus group study that was conducted by Blanchett regarding community leaders' perceptions of contributing factors to special education referral and placement. There were 15 participants who identified

themselves as a Person of Color (i.e., African American, Native American, or Hispanic) or mixed race (e.g., Mexican, Irish, and Filipino). Also, the participants were composed of administrators of nonprofit organization, community-based educational researchers, community-based social workers, parents, activist, consultants, and family service coordinators. The participants were from a large Midwestern metropolitan community where disproportionate representation of Students of Color existed. The results revealed that the participants believed that lack of appropriate pre-referral interventions and support in the general education settings, lack of diversity of teachers, and the lack of support to assist students and families in navigating the school's cultural systems were contributing factors to special education referral and placement.

Although teachers' referral of Black students for special education does not directly cause overrepresentation, the referral process may contribute to Black children being overrepresented in special education because of test bias and cultural mismatch in teaching and learning styles (Mandell, Davis, Bevans, & Guevara, 2008; Moore, 2002). Some teachers are referring Black students to special education based on their negative perceptions about Black culture and language (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003).

Perspectives of Overrepresentation

Black children have been consistently overrepresented in special education for over 40 years. Very few research studies have examined educators' perspectives of overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs for mild disabilities (Skiba et al., 2006). Gardner and Miranda (2001) stated that inequalities continue to exist

within the United States educational system, especially among Students of Color in poverty who are living in urban areas. In addition, most of the Students of Color represent a large percentage of the population living in poverty in urban areas are African Americans (Gardner & Miranda, 2001). These students are being placed in school settings where they have limited resources and the teachers have limited teaching experiences. The combination of limited resources and experiences results in some teachers having struggles and challenges working with Black students to who they have difficulty relating. This has contributed to African American students being overrepresented or being disproportionately placed in special education compared to their European counterparts.

Thomas-Tate, Washington, and Edwards (2004) examined the performance of a group of African American first-grade students from low-income families on a standardized test of phonological awareness. Fifty-six low-income Black first-grade students, ranging in age from 6 years 2 months to 7 years 2 months, participated in the study: males (n = 25) and females (n=31). Thomas-Tate, Washington, and Edwards used the Test of Phonological Assessment (TOPA) Early-Elementary-Version. The format of the tasks in this test requires students to compare and identify final consonants. The mean score for the participants in the study group was significantly lower than the standard mean and was significantly negatively skewed. Although this construct has been shown to be theoretically sound for other populations, the TOPA may not be a suitable assessment instrument for Black students. Final consonant deletion is a prevalent phonological feature of African American English. In turn, these dialect differences may

result in Black students being referred to special education for learning disabilities. The referral process that teachers are using is having a negative impact on students, which may be a precursor for overrepresentation.

In a qualitative study that Shippen, Curtis, and Miller (2009) conducted, 13 general education teachers, special education teachers, and schools counselor in a rural school district in Alabama were surveyed. This particular school district had a history of overrepresentation of Blacks students in special education. The district has three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of school counselors, general educators, and special educators on the topic of overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs with a specific interest in the role that systematic bias may contribute to overrepresentation. A focus group was conducted separately for each of the three groups. There were several findings from the general education teachers, special education teachers, and the school counselors. The general education teachers stated that (a) they did not think that overrepresentation was a problem, (b) there was a lack of parent involvement, and (c) there was a lack of resources to assist the students with their education. The special education teachers cited gaps in early education services for children, lack of prenatal care, and challenges to working parents as contributing to factors to overrepresentation. The school counselors stated that genetics, parents with disabilities, and an association with number of children in free lunch programs at their schools might be contributing factors but not causes of overrepresentation.

Skiba et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study to explore local processes that may contribute to disproportionate representation in special education. There were a total of 66 participants who were individually administered a semi-structured interview. The participants included a special education director and nine school psychologists from each of the seven districts: 20 school principals and assistant principals and 28 classroom teachers. There were a total of six Black teachers and one under the category of principals/assistant principals. The participants were interviewed on their perspectives on urban education, available and needed resources, special education, and specific topics of diversity and disproportionate representation. There were 14 elementary schools from seven school districts in and surrounding a large Midwestern city. All of the school districts were identified as having disproportionate numbers of Students of Color in special education. The results of the study indicate that the following contribute to the overrepresentation of Students of Color: (a) the referral process by educators and parents; especially when it relates to behavior, retaining a student in the same grade level, or pressure for higher standardized test scores; (b) cultural mismatch between teachers and students that can lead to diagnosis of emotionally disturbed category; and (c) teachers believe that students will get more resources in special education due to limited resources in general education.

In Dykes (2008), a qualitative method was used to learn about strategies, policies, and procedures that were being implemented to eliminate the overrepresentation of Black students in special educations at three East Texas elementary schools. Participants included three elementary principals, three special education administrators, and 18

elementary school teachers. There was no information provided on the demographic makeup of the participants. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a special education director and an elementary principal at each location. Also, six teachers, at each of the three locations, participated in a focus group interview at their specific location. The data collection consisted of interviews, observation, and informational retrieval from documents. The findings revealed what the participants believed were the contributing factors of overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs: (a) poverty- “I think poverty is a major reason for special education referrals in our district and for minorities, succinctly” (p. 7); (b) lack of parent involvement- “I think that somehow many parents have figured out that there are benefits that come with eligibility” (p. 8); (c) bias in assessments- special education administrators “had worked with their staff members to use culturally sensitive assessment instruments in evaluation students with minority backgrounds” (p. 8); (d) financial incentives- “I think poverty is a major reason for special education referrals in our district and for minorities, succinctly “(p. 7); and (e) and lack of diversity training- “I feel it [diversity training] has been negligible. You are not going to change mindsets. You know the majority of teachers from this area were trained in this area and have stayed in this area” (p. 9).

Kearns, Ford, and Linney (2005) conducted a quantitative and qualitative study with school psychologists about their perceptions of the disproportionate representation of Black students in special education with mild disabilities. A total of 151 school psychologists were selected from a list of 1,500 specialist-level school psychologists that

was obtained from the National Association of School Psychologist database. The participants consisted of 131 Caucasian school psychologists, 120 of whom were female. The study did not provide any other ethnic background information on the participants. Also, school categories—elementary, middle, or high school—levels were not provided. The participants worked in the Southeastern region of the United States. Once the final version of survey instrument was established, it was mailed to the participants. The survey consisted of questions regarding cultural competence, demographic information, factors contributing to special education placement, high placements of Black students with mild disabilities, and solutions to eliminate high placements. When the participants were asked to name three causes for the high percentage of Black students placed in special education, a total of 358 responses were provided. The findings from the respondents revealed that the most influential factor when examining disproportionate representation of Black students in special education was the lack of parent involvement with their child's education (30.44%), pressure from parents and teachers to place Black students in special education (21.22%), and the failure of special education and regular education school systems (16.48%).

In a qualitative study, Williams (2007) used case study designed to investigate four Black parents' perception of school efficacy in the community that they lived. There were one-on-one interviews and group interviews. The participants were a part of a group of African American parents in North Carolina who appealed to the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights to examine policies, practices, and procedures that they perceived as inappropriate in identifying children for special education services. The

findings revealed that (a) teachers did not care about the academic success of the students- “They’re not teaching anything in those classes. There’s nothing educational. It’s like a first-class babysitting service” (p. 253); (b) there were problems mislabeling students-“I wanted to know if the school psychologist could find out what was going on with him-what made him this sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When I got the report back, I was furious. It was a typical white woman’s view of a black man. It said he was depressed, that he could do harm to himself. The recommendation was for BEH-behaviorally and emotionally handicapped” (p. 254); (c) teachers did not understand the culture of the students- “After a while, black kids want to let the teachers know that they know the answers, so they start shouting out responses. When they do, the teachers say they’re disruptive and need to be in self-contained classes” (p. 254); and (d) misused and abused of protocol- “For example, according to IDEA, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is supposed to be written by parents, teachers, and administrators who know the child. When parents get to the IEP meetings (in Wallace County), the IEP is already written. They read it to you, turn it toward you, and say sign it” (p. 255).

Summary

In summary, the literature has suggested that the major contributions to overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs are the following: (a) lack of cultural competent assessments (Taylor & Lee, 1987), (b) the teachers’ referral process (Bacon, Banks, Young, & Jackson, 2007; Cullian & Kauffman, 2005), (c) disciplinary procedures (Fenning & Rose, 2007), (d) teachers not understanding the students’ culture (Williams, 2007), (e) test bias in construct validity (Brown, Reynolds, &

Whitaker, 1999), (f) inappropriate standardized sampling (Harrington, 1975), (g) examiner and language bias (Taylor & Lee, 1987), and (h) lack of family involvement in their child's education (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005).

Therefore, these major contributors to overrepresentation in special education programs provides teachers with a broader perspective on the impact that overrepresentation has on Black children. Although there is research to support the impact that teachers' perception has on addressing overrepresentation, this study contributes to the research by addressing Black early childhood teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities and their ideas about solutions that address overrepresentation. It is essential for teachers to understand how their beliefs and views of their students influence their instruction (Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009). Neal, McCray, and Webb-Johnson (2001) stated that teachers must teach in ways that are culturally appropriate. Teachers must understand how their cultural views may impact their perceptions of overrepresentation of Black students in special education (Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009). Because there is a strong need to prepare culturally competent early childhood educators (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009; Miller & Fuller, 2006), Black early childhood teachers' knowledge about their racial identity and their racial socialization process must be integrated with a critical race theoretical framework in order to challenge and eliminate overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs for mild disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

There has been limited understanding of Black early childhood teachers' voices and perspectives on Black early childhood students in special education (Moore, 2002). Because of this limitation, the purpose of this study was to investigate Black teachers' perspectives on the overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities. By using qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach, the information from this study better informs educators, researchers, families, and policy makers by addressing overrepresentation of Black early childhood students. The chapter begins by discussing the design, method, and procedures of the research study. I include the objectives of the study, research questions that guide the study, and a description of the site and participants. Profiles are provided of the participants' demographic background. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion on data analysis and data collection procedures, including validity and ethical issues.

Research Design

The main theoretical approach of this study is critical race theory. Critical race theory examines policies, practices, and procedures that are rooted in racial inequalities and legal injustices within the educational system (Taylor, 2006). It is well-documented in the research literature that Black students are overrepresented in special education programs in comparison with the population percentage in the general population

(Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005). Critical race theory illustrates how this overrepresentation cannot be eliminated without understanding the historical context of racial hostility and oppression against Black people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory argues how individuals should critique and challenge the racist practices and policies within educational systems. Thus, the history of overrepresentation amongst Black students within special education has its origin in racial discrimination policies, practices, and procedures (Kunjufu, 2001).

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to investigate Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives surrounding the overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities?
2. What solutions do Black early childhood teachers believe need to occur in order to eliminate the overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities?

A qualitative research study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding from the participants about their perspectives of Black students being overrepresented in special education for mild disabilities. Qualitative research is centered on exploring phenomena (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner 2011; Creswell, 2009), which consists of

nonnumeric information, such as personal documents, field notes, videotapes, memos, and interview transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The gathering of the qualitative data enabled me to further clarify the problems related to overrepresentation as well as answer the research questions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that a qualitative research approach “demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothings trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5).

Bogdan and Biklen, (2007) outlined examples of characteristics of qualitative research:

1. Naturalistic-qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with the context.
2. Descriptive Data-the data that are collected are descriptive as they take on the form of pictures or words instead of numbers. The data may include personal documents, field notes, videotapes, memos, interview transcripts, photographs, and other official documents.
3. Concerns with Process-researchers are concerned with process rather with outcomes or products.
4. Inductive-researchers analyze their data inductively. Theories emerge from the bottom up based on many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected.

5. Meaning-researchers are interested on how people make sense of their lives. They are concerned with the participants' perspectives and capture them accurately.

By understanding the characteristics of qualitative methods, I examined the phenomenon of overrepresentation of Black students in special education from the perspectives of Black teachers. Using phenomenology from a critical race theoretical perspective, I wanted to understand Black teachers overall perspective of overrepresentation in special education programs as well as solutions that they have established that would eliminate overrepresentation in special education programs. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described a phenomenological approach as one where “researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in a particular situation” (p. 25). Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2011) noted that phenomenology involves the description of an individual or group of individuals’ conscious experience of a phenomenon. For data collection and data analysis, phenomenologists encourage participants to describe the experience in their own terms through in-depth interviews or open-ended questionnaires. In addition, a phenomenological approach is written in narrative form as much as the final results should include a rich detailed description of their experiences (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011). Thus, the phenomenology approach aligns with my theoretical orientation of critical race theory because it allows Black teachers to share and address their experiences regarding their perspectives of concerns and solution of overrepresentation of Black early childhood students.

Setting

The setting for this study was in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. According to the Thirty-Fifth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 11.2% of the Black resident population ages 6 through 21 were served through IDEA. The percentage for Black students ranged from 8.3% through 18.9%. In the District of Columbia, 14.8% of the Black students ages 6 through 21 were served under IDEA compared to 1.7% of the White students; in Maryland, 9.8% of the Black students ages 6 through 21 were served under IDEA compared to 6.1% of the White students; in Virginia, 11.5% of the Black students ages 6 through 21 were served under IDEA compared to 7.5% of the White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Participants

Demographic information was collected to examine the qualities and the characteristics of the participants with that of their perspectives of overrepresentation. All of the participants were teachers in early childhood education. They had at least six years of teaching experience and were currently working with at least one child identified with mild disability and receiving special education services. All of the teachers who participated in the study are certified and/or licensed to teach early childhood education. The educational level for these teachers ranged from bachelor's to master's degrees. All of the teachers worked within the public school system in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. Four of the teachers were special education teachers while five of the teachers were general education teachers (see Table 2).

Participants Selection

In addition, the selection criteria for the teachers were as followed: (a) identify your race as Black, (b) teach in one of the following grade levels: pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, or 3rd grade, (c) certified and/or licensed to teach early childhood education, (d) currently work with Black early childhood students who have an identified mild disability and who receives special education services, (e) believe that there is a problem with Black children being overrepresented in early childhood special education for children for mild disabilities, and (f) have at least one solution to eliminate overrepresentation of Black children in early childhood special education for children for mild disabilities (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Description

All Participants						
Type of Teacher	Special Education 4	General Education 5				
Grade Level	Pre-kindergarten 3	Kindergarten 1	1st Grade 1	2nd Grade 1	3rd Grade 1	
Zip Code	20009 20019	20603 20706	20707 20724	20772 21228	23225	
Type of School	Public 9	Private	Charter			
Years of Teaching	1-5	6-10 2	11-15 4	16-20	20 or more 3	
Years of Teaching in Early Childhood Education	1-5 1	6-10 3	11-15 4	16-20	20 or more 1	
Gender	Male 1	Female 8				
Age	21-31 2	32-42 4	43-53 1	54-64 1	65-75 1	76 and over
Highest Level of Education	Bachelors 2	Masters 7	Doctorate			

After receiving IRB approval, I talked to colleagues who are teacher educators. I asked them to recommend Black early childhood teachers who currently teach early childhood children in special education (see Table 2). The teachers in this study included eight women and one man between the ages of 21 and 75, all of whom taught in elementary public schools in an area in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The participants had at least one year of early childhood teaching experience. All of the participants had a least bachelor's degree.

Table 2

Participant Selection

Estimate number of teacher educators seeking recommendation	25
Actual number of teacher educators sought recommendation	16
Actual number of teacher educators that recommended other teachers	10
Estimate number of teachers that fit list from 1 st criteria	30
Actual number of teachers that fitted list from 1 st criteria	17
Actual number of teachers that fitted full criteria	10
Actual number of teachers that interviewed face-to-face	9

The teachers in this study were purposefully selected. The researcher intentionally selected individuals to share their perspectives on this central phenomenon. The participants provided useful information for addressing the research and they facilitated the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Collection

Prior to my data collection, I piloted the interview protocol by administering my interview questions to an early childhood educator. I interviewed a certified Black early childhood teacher who resides in Maryland. Based on the participant's feedback, I created the final version of my interview questions. The information in the pilot was not included in the findings because the purpose of the pilot was to refine the interview questions.

I invited each of the nine teachers to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. The participants and I agreed upon the appropriate time and location for each interview to take place based on everyone's availability. Separate interviews occurred at a participant's home, a restaurant, a library, and on a college campus. I informed the participants that the data in this study would be confidential. Pseudonyms were used instead of their real names. Instead of the participants' names, a code was placed on the surveys and other collected data. Through the use of an identification key, I was able to link the participants' survey and other collected data to their identity and was the only one who had access to the identification key. The nine teachers were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason.

After having each participant review and sign the informed consent document, I had the participants complete a 10-question demographic survey. Upon their completion of the survey, I conducted the one-on-one, semi-structured interview with each individual.

I encouraged the participants to express their perspectives openly and honestly on all of the interview questions. As a reminder, I informed each participant at the beginning of the interview session that his/her participation was voluntarily and that they can remove themselves from the study at any time.

The interview questions were divided into three major sections in order to gather a rich and thorough understanding of Black early childhood perspectives of overrepresentation. For the purpose of this study, I used an in-depth interviewing approach. The interview questions are important because they explore the role of teachers' racial identity and views of race relations and how their perspectives correlate with their perceptions of overrepresentation. After the interview was completed, I presented a \$20 gift card to each of the teachers for participating in this study.

The interviews took place over a two-week time period. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. I used probing and rephrasing statements to encourage participant elaboration. I digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews with the permission of each participant as well as assuring, in writing and verbally, the confidentiality of these interviews. The data will be destroyed five years after the study is completed. The researcher is trained in the ethical responsibility of human subject research and has successfully completed the Citi Course Protection of Human Subjects certification program.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data during and after the data collection process to determine emerging themes. Data analysis is a process that allows researchers to code their data and

then segregate “the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and description” (Glesne, 2006, p.147). This interpretive process allows for the organization of data to formulate explanations, categories and patterns (Glesne, 2006). Creswell (2009) emphasizes that qualitative research involves data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes and the researcher makes interpretation of the meaning of the data. Thus, I utilized the following purposed outlined approach to data analysis by Creswell (2009):

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis through transcribing interviews (p. 185).
2. Read through all the data. Get a general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning (p. 185).
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process. Coding means organizing the material into chunks or segments of text (paragraphs) before bringing meaning to information (p. 186).
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis (p. 189).
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative (p. 189).
6. A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data (p. 189).

Prior to my interviews and review of the interview transcripts, I formed three organizational categories: racial injustices, parent contributions, and teacher advocacy. These organizational categories were created and guided by my research questions developed for this study. According to Maxwell (2005), organization categories “are broad areas or issues that you establish prior to your interviews or observations, or that could usually have been anticipated (p.97). As I began to analyze the data, I realized that many codes fell under each section of my organizational categories. Because I know that organizational categories are used for scoring data for future analysis (Maxwell, 2005), I noticed that new categories started to emerge.

My first step in data analysis was to listen to the interviews prior to transcribing them. I organized and prepared the data analysis through transcribing interviews. While transcribing the data, I wrote notes on what I heard. I read the transcripts to examine of the data from each interviewee and attended to the emerging themes. I read through all of the data several times to get a general sense of the information and reflect on the overall meaning. While reading through the data, I started thinking about what is truly important for the dissertation compared to what is best for future research. Maxwell (2005) suggested that during the reading or listening stage of data analysis, the researcher should write notes and “develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships (p. 96).

Next, I engaged in detailed analysis through a coding process by organizing the material into like-minded chunks or segments of text (Creswell, 2009); thus, creating an organizational framework (Glesne, 2006). Coding is a process of sorting and defining my interview transcripts that apply to my research purpose (Glesne, 2006). Maxwell (2005)

stated that the goal of coding is to “rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of the theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 95).

I began coding the data sentence-by-sentence and then by paragraphs. I started to notice that I was generating a number of codes for each answer to the interview questions: “inequalities,” “positive transference,” and “discrimination.” More so, I realized that many of the same occurring codes were being repeated: “home life,” “psychological impact,” and “misdiagnoses.” I initially identified 193 codes that were significant with addressing my research questions. These codes stimulated thought provoking analysis and interpretation on the meaning of having the voices of teachers describe their perspectives of overrepresentation (see Appendix A). While refining the codes to further address the research questions, I noticed that certain codes remained consistent throughout the data. After careful analysis of identifying the codes, I synthesized the data to 87 codes (see Appendix B). These codes provided information that was used for generating themes. Through the interviews, two categories emerged: (1) identified Black early childhood teachers’ perspective of overrepresentation of Black students in special education and (2) Black teachers’ perspective on solutions to eliminate this overrepresentation. As these categories were identified, subsequent categories were developed that were significant to the research questions, thus reducing large amounts of information. While identifying categories that were similar and different, themes began to evolve. After grouping these themes, I sent three educators (early childhood teacher, social work professor, and a middle school counselor) separate emerging themes and

codes. I met with each individually to review their analysis of the presented themes and codes. After a thorough conversation, we were able to come to an agreement and finalize the themes and codes. The categories developed the following four emerging themes: (1) knowledge of self, (2) student evaluations, (3) parent support, and (4) teacher advocacy. In addition, each theme contains subthemes (see Appendix C).

Because the teachers' statements regarding overrepresentation were becoming repetitive, I decided to stop the interviews after nine participants were interviewed. I realized that I was at a point that the themes were fully developed and new information might not produce additional themes. Creswell (2008) stated that saturation is "the point where you have identified the major themes and no new information can add to your list of themes or to the detail for existing themes" (p. 257).

Validity

Creswell (2009) states "qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 190). There are several ways that I addressed validity issues. First, by using a subjectivity statement, I clarified my cultural background and my biases. I also discussed how they shape my interpretation of the findings. Second, I documented my personal experience and reflections during each phase of the investigation in a journal. Third, I engaged in triangulation by working with three peers to analyze the data. Triangulation is the use of several methods (additional sources or researchers) that provides a better understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011). Fourth, I met with my professors for the purpose to critique my data

analysis, my writing and reflection, and my research process. Finally, peer reviewing and debriefing occurred at the beginning and end of the data collection and data analysis process. I presented my work and talked to other doctoral students about issues and challenges of data collection, analysis, and findings.

Summary

Within this chapter, I provided detailed information on the method that I used for this study. Using a phenomenological approach and critical race theory as my theoretical orientation, I was able to gather data from interviews with nine teachers. Also, information on the setting, participants, criteria, and data collection were provided. In addition, I elaborated on the data analysis process that consisted with the developing of codes, categories, and themes. Finally, I was able to provide an overall framework that detailed different components entailed within this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study informed by nine key participants identified by the pseudonyms Aset, Nzingha, Sheba, Ptah, Cleopatra, Nefertiti, Makeda, Tyie, and Hatshepsut who gives their perspective of Black early childhood students being overrepresented in special education programs for mild disabilities. Because the participants embrace their cultural African heritage, I gave them popular African names to replace their real names. There is no direct link between the socio-historical meaning of the figure with their pseudonyms and the current data. These nine teachers were chosen to be key participants because of their diverse experiences working with Black children in early childhood education as well as their rich descriptions of concerns and solutions for eliminating overrepresentation. My goal is to advance the extensive research about overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Dunn, 1968; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005; Krezimen, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Kunjufu, 2001; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006) by examining Black early childhood teachers' perspectives regarding overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities. I addressed the following research questions throughout this study:

1. What are Black early childhood education teachers' perceptions of overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities?
2. What solutions do Black early childhood teachers believe need to occur in order to eliminate the overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities?

The results from the data gathered, which were analyzed based on interviews, produced four major themes: (a) knowledge of self, (b) student evaluations, (c) parental support, and (d) teacher advocacy. In this chapter, I briefly discuss the four major themes and as well as their subthemes as they relate to the purpose of the study and to the research questions.

Knowledge of Self

The theme of knowledge of self is an integral part of Black early childhood education teachers' perspective of concerns and solutions for addressing overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities. This theme reveals teachers' perspectives of their racial identity and how their perspective of their racial identity impacts their teaching relationship with Black students. The subthemes of racial pride, cultural disappointment, and student investment are explored.

Racial pride. The voices from each teacher illustrated a deep and vibrant sense of love, appreciation, and pride for their Black racial identity. They appreciated the

wonderful sacrifices and legacies of their Black ancestors. While many of the teachers appreciated who they are and believed that Black culture is filled with a rich and beautiful heritage, Makeda gracefully elaborated on her appreciation of her racial identity by stating, “I appreciate who I am and I don’t think anybody has any more of a rich heritage than I do, or we do as a culture.” Sheba beautifully echoed Makeda’s thoughts by saying, “Black people set the foundation for this country. And everything that is great, Black people has done it.” She further described the positive attributes that exhibits her racial identity:

I’m proud of my racial identity. I believe, I’m good. I’m a leader. I’m positive.

I’m spiritual. I haven’t thought about being anyone else. So, my identity is all that I have. I’ve never been ashamed to be Black or thought about how it would be to be someone else or how my life would be different.

Ptah continued by emphasizing how he embraces his racial identity and uses it as a catalyst to make himself a stronger and wiser Black man. He stated:

I feel like with that [my racial identity] empowers my manliness. It’s like, being Black-a Black man- strengthens my bones as a man. I’m not just any man. I’m a Black man. Through experience, I learned that I am resilient. I learned that I am dedicated and persistent. I learned that I have a lot of thoughts. I’m creative. I’m analytical. I’m inquisitive. And, I learned that I’m brave. I go out there. I don’t care what you want to do. I will do what I want to do. What you won’t do, I will do. I believe that’s because I’m Black. When you tell me no- I will go, and I will say yes. You can’t tell me no, that’s what comes to mind. You will never tell me

no, and I accept no. If I think yes is the answer, yes is what you will receive. So that part about being Black, I guess that makes me stronger than just being a man.

Cultural disappointment. Although the voices of the teachers acknowledged appreciation for their Black racial identity, they also acknowledged hurt and disappointment regarding the current state and perception of Black culture. They believed that Black people have become powerless due to their struggle to live up to their full potential. While Makeda discussed how some Black people have given away their power instead of “standing strong in what they believe in,” Tyie acknowledged how some Black people are starting to feel powerless. She stated, “I’m a member of a race who has just been named and explained by everyone except for one’s self.” Aset added on to Tyie’s comment by discussing Black people’s lack of empowerment to make life better for their community and for themselves may impact future generations:

I think we short change ourselves. We really truly were not living the life that we could really live. I don’t think we’re doing what we need to do in order to be that successful person or community. Or in some ways, were not doing what we need to be done in order to help each other, make life better for ourselves, for our generations behind us.

Aset’s disheartening perspective regarding Black people’s journey toward reaching and embracing their full potential in life was echoed by her belief that Black people’s mental well-being is distorted. She realized that Black people have given away “our power” to others instead of standing strong and firm in what Black people believe in

as well as being able to express what Black people truly want in life. She continued to elaborate further by saying:

We don't really go out and prove people wrong. That's what I say. We have a mindset of that's what they say- it's right, and we don't really search within ourselves to reach for another level. We're not living to our full potential.

More specifically, the process of understanding one's racial identity has lead Ptah on a challenging journey to understand his full potential. Although he loves being a Black man, he believes that his difficult upbringing and negative self-perceptions of being a Black man has created challenges for him embracing his Black manhood. He indicated that the lack of guidance and support from his family about Black manhood and Black cultural survival strategies has created confusion for him on certain aspects of his racial identity:

It's [explaining how he grew up understanding his Black culture] sensitive in the sense that I think my mother did it wrong. I think that my family did it wrong. I think that I was made to fear society in a sense that everything was shown to me in the negative side of being Black rather than the positive side of being Black. What she did not say about how to be a Black male and be successful in this world, couple that with how the world will perceive you by being a Black male. There was no rooted or grass roots of being Black, or understanding that I'm Black. That I'm beautiful or powerful because I'm a minority in this world. I have the majority of this world. But there was no uncle, no father that said this is how you do this or this is how you do that. With all the power and tools you have- take

that and channel it and tunnel it this way. A lot of Black men are raised with the absence, without a father. I never really thought about what it means to be Black for myself as it reflects me as myself. I never thought of myself, never looked in the mirror and said, "I am a Black man and what does that means?" Like I know what it means, but I don't know what it means to me. Like, if I just took all the odds out of life and just looked in the mirror and said I am a Black man, I wouldn't know what that means.

Therefore, Hatshepsut reiterated the notion that Black teachers must first embrace and love their culture in order to work with Black students:

I feel like a Black teacher has to know who they are, know themselves, to love themselves in order to treat Black children well because I've seen, in general, in this world -who[people] had a low opinion of themselves and they were not happy. They were depressed or something and they could not give all they could to other peoples. So, I hope I'm making myself clear. So for example, a person who is not in tune with their own Blackness, or who doesn't like being Black would not be a good teacher for children because they have a low opinion of what it means to be Black. So they would be a worse person to teach that black child than someone of another race. And in turn, someone of another race, if they had a good opinion of themselves than the other person, that other person would do a better job than the black teacher, male or female, who didn't like being black or like black children.

Therefore, Sheba believed that teachers must believe in the students' ability to succeed as well as become positive role models for them:

If my perception is that my children can't learn or they don't deserve the best, then my role as a teacher, it won't be effective. And I see that every day. Frankly, it's an unsaid type of attitude whereas the perception is the children are failures or oh they come from a broken home so they can't do this, but my perception has never been that. I believe that it can be done and once the kids see your attitudes and your roles, they can do anything. And they can feel that you believe in them.

Student investment. The teachers expressed that their passion for understanding their own racial identity and culture has motivated them to invest a lot of their time, effort, commitment, and energy toward creating an environment that promotes examples of their love and appreciation for Black students' racial identity and culture. Sheba feels that it is her calling to educate Black children because "this is all that I want to do." Similar to Sheba, Nzingha really enjoys educating children who look like her as well as working with them and seeing them maximize their full potentials:

I try to remind them that they're beautiful. When I see Black children who look like me, or who don't look like me, I try to remind them that they are beautiful or capable, they are smart; that they can do whatever they want to do with hard work, persistence, and that sometimes life situations aren't great. I try to talk to them about that because everybody is not dealt the same cards, but I try to be encouraging to the kids.

Nzingha further elaborated on how she remembered growing up in a predominately White neighborhood and not feeling loved and appreciated by the White people in the community because she was Black. She felt isolated and stated she did not “ever want my students or my children down the road to ever feel that way... ever.”

The teachers’ desire to be great role models for the students enabled them to talk about being a positive and powerful example for their students just as they would want someone else to be positive and powerful example for their children. For example, Hatshepsut “feels a strong sense of responsibility” and commitment to wanting to be the kind of teacher that she would be to her children. Likewise, Sheba also embraced her commitment to investing in Black students by stating, “I constantly think about what I’d want my own child to see, learn, [and] do.” In addition, Aset embraces the commitment to invest in her children’s lives as well as her investment in educating Black students:

I’m raising two African American males. That’s important to me that they grow up and be successful. I know if I can make a difference in their lives, I can instill values in other children. I enjoy teaching African American children.

The desire to educate Black students as well as to be a supportive resource for them as they encounter struggles and hardships in life is very important to all of the teachers. Thus, Nerfertiti discussed the importance of her identifying with and supporting Black students during their difficult challenges:

I think I look at them as my own child, and I have set a high standard for learning for him. I also set that standard for them because I identify with them. I too came from a single parent home. And when I moved from the country, my mom worked

in convenience stores. So we lived in not the best neighborhoods. So I identify and know what they're going through. So knowing the barriers that they might face, it's what helps me because I myself remember my African American teachers picking me up because they knew my mom was at work. I struggled with math. I had that teacher who'd drive me home. And from what was given to me, I in turn want to give that to someone else. So, maybe that's why I do what I do.

These teachers recognized how their racial pride and cultural knowledge were major factors in helping them to overcome many struggles and obstacles that they have experienced in life. Because they knew about the challenges that Black students encounter, these teachers realized that they must try to instill racial pride and cultural knowledge in Black students so it can motivate the students to overcome struggles and challenges that they may experience in special education. The teachers believed that if Black educators have a negative perception of their own racial identity, they would think and act negatively toward Black students. In turn, this would create a climate that would continue to oppress Black students as well as reduce the chances that Black teachers would implement solutions to eliminate overrepresentation.

Student Evaluations

Many of the teachers questioned how students are being evaluated by educators. Cleopatra stressed that “maybe there needs to be a lot of focus on going into the classrooms and seeing who's working with the kids and see how they are being evaluated.” Therefore, the theme of student evaluations is an important component of Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives for identifying concerns and

solutions for addressing overrepresentation. In addition, the subthemes of behavioral labels, background knowledge and tests, and psychological and career impact are discussed.

Behavioral labels. Some of the teachers believed that many educators rush to place Black students, who have behavioral concerns, in special education rather than take time to work with the students. Sheba discussed her observation:

Well, I've been teaching 13 years, and over these years, it's like special education has become a dumping ground for children with behavioral problems. First, you start to notice how it affects academics, and it's so frustrating when you see because that's the answer... so the first thing they do or first intervention is, we're going to write it up [referral for special education].

I'm angry about it because no one with the powers that be, no one wants to hear why the children, why their underperforming or are acting out or being referred. They just want to put a label on it and move on.

Cleopatra noticed that it is easier for teachers to place students in special education programs rather than work with them, especially with Black males:

I think sometimes if a kid misbehaves, "oh they are special education"... I think it's easier to place someone there rather than work with them. I think it's really hard for Black males to grow up nowadays. If we give them a label, that will fix the situation. It depends on who's giving the evaluation. It's easier to put a label rather than come up with strategies to give to the parents.

Cleopatra further stated, “For evaluators, I think it's like this idea if you're a black boy you're bad. If you're active, you're bad. I think it's easier for them to say they are black; little boys aren't going to amount to anything.” In addition, Aset commented on how she believes that some educators think that “all African kids are ADHD” because of their behavior:

A lot of children who are receiving services from where we're from, they want to say 'oh their ADHD, but they are not. That's why we have so many because people don't know how to channel that behavior. I think it's a behavior thing, and people don't know how to address them so they just label them. They are not really special education, but the kids are not getting the help they need.

Ptah placed some of the responsibility of rush placement in special education on the lack of perseverance with some of the general education teachers. His views were that some of the general education teachers believe that working with students with behavior problems is overbearing and the teachers “don't have time for that different instruction they are going to need.” He continued by stating:

Not to mention that some general education teachers just don't put in all the work, not to say anything bad about all general education teachers. But, there are some that have the type of feeling. It's overbearing for them, and then you know, everything else that goes with why so many students are in special education.

Aset agreed with Ptah that some teachers do not have time to include different instructions for students with behavior challenges. She stated, “When they [students]

interrupt the teachers, you [teachers] want to let them go [place them in special education] because their interfering with what you have set planned.

Thus, Ptah does not believe that general education teachers are prepared to work with students with special needs because they lack knowledge about the special education profession:

I talked to one of my coworkers and she said, as a general education teacher, she doesn't have to take one special education class. I personally think that going through [special education class] should be a requirement for special education course work and general course work in order to make a highly qualified teacher. I think we should take them together. I took my Praxis I and II special education and my content. I've taken three practice courses. They certified me as a special education teacher, which included some of the same stuff I need to do as general education. But through my education, I took several general education courses for teaching students. But, my general education coworker just wanted to be a general education teacher. She doesn't have to take one. So when those kids come in, and you're in a high needs neighborhood, you're going to have a lot of students who need a lot of support [dealing with their behavior] and you know you're going to have a high level of special education students in your classroom. And you should be prepared to deal with them and to teach them.

Tyie gave an example of how she worked with a student who was displaying behavioral challenges:

There is a son [student] that I work with in the four year old program; I started working with him in the three year old program. He had an IEP with 10 hours of his literacy tasks and numeracy tasks. I go to work with the boy, of course he's scattered and fidgety, no I [the boy] don't want to do that. And I started introducing the sounds that go with the letters, and the poor thing already knew that. So what was he doing with an IEP for 10 hours?

Background knowledge and tests. Many of the teachers concluded that the lack of knowledge about the student's background as well as culturally bias test has led to Black students being overrepresented in special education. Aset believed that "it takes time getting to know a child and to find out what things are affecting their life. Some point we have to in order to not just label them so quickly." Nerfertiti emphasized how she believes that Black students' home environment should be included in their evaluation for determining special education placement. She provides an example about the impact of knowing a child's home environment:

I know for Head Start, they do a family history. Let's say you found out that history before you put that child up [in special education]- that grandma had a fifth-grade education, momma dropped out at eighth-grade. So, it's not the child that's special education bound, they just may not of had the experience... so getting to know the families [is important].

Some of teachers believed that some students may not perform well in the classroom because they are experiencing stressful challenges at home. These stressful challenges may result in students performing poorly academically or being inattentive in

the classroom. Therefore, educators' lack of knowledge about the contributing factors of a student's home life on their academic performance may result in Black students being placed in special education.

Ptah discussed mental and physical trauma that some students may experience within their home environment, which may affect their academic performance:

[I] made sure all the needs are met, go back to all the basics. One of my students walks in the door he's tired, he gets a nap. I can't perform if I'm not comfortable. I can't do anything if I'm hungry. I can't think. So, if you're hungry, I know you can't think either. If you're sleepy, you don't want to work; if I'm sleepy, I don't want to work; if I'm tired I don't want to talk; if I don't feel fresh, I don't want to be around people.

Cleopatra echoed Ptah's statement regarding stressful challenges that students may encounter within their home environment, which can lead to the students not performing well academically:

A big factor is the home environment. Drugs, home life, some of it's social. Some kids never have a sense of home. There's a lot of stuff going on whether it's violence, drugs, alcohol; so kids acting out. Some kids are born with delays. I think a lot has to do with the home though. This girl was in a broken home. She was living with her grandmother, and she didn't do her homework because her grandmother didn't understand enough to help other. There are so many things that factor into being overrepresented [in special education].

Although stressful challenges within the student's home environment may cause them to not perform well academically, Nzingha discussed how educators' lack of knowledge about Black students' home environment may lead toward educators' misunderstanding of Black students response on evaluation tests- which may further contribute to the students being placed in special education programs:

Well, with my experience in early childhood, I noticed that a lot of the screenings and the norms of how testing created is based off a larger population, which is Caucasian. And some things, our children in certain neighborhoods are not exposed to. For instance, I recognize that one of the reasons why our kids are being overrepresented is that the stuff isn't necessarily culturally relevant for them.

A lot of times they don't get the opportunity to see a tractor. So you have a child that might be scored down for something like that and that of course... or other things that they might have going on, like the kite. A lot of kids don't know what a kite is in this area. And until people recognize that those things are represented in evaluations and that they ultimately harm children who are not exposed to those things, then it hurt kids and over represents [in special education] them.

Nzingha wanted "individuals who are doing the screenings and everything to understand that different cultures have different knowledge and experiences." She continued by adding:

Please, if you're evaluating children who's lived in the city, who's never seen a tractor, who's three or four years old, please don't hold that against them. But ask them something they might have seen. Make it appropriate for them."

Sheba further explored how the creation of different types of tests should be used to evaluate students instead of the use of a single standardized test, which may result in eliminating overrepresentation:

I believe there needs to be a standardized test but should not be the end all or determining factor of decisions because the children show how they learn in different ways. And in test taking, it's a tax for a lot of children. You have to be taught how to take a test and perform under the clock, with precision and to be a critical thinker. And you don't have the time within the classes to really teach children that and now they're testing them younger and younger. So a solution would be to give different kinds of tests, functional tests not just academic, or observations—longitudinal tests where you can test the progress not just from year to year, all the months within the school year.

Cleopatra echoed Sheba, noting that "they [students] get screened and [evaluators] go by one assessment. One kid may not be comfortable with a screener and might not respond. So they'll use that and say the child is delayed. Furthermore, Aset agreed with Sheba and Cleopatra regarding reevaluating our current testing methods as possible solutions for eliminating overrepresentation. She believes that outdated tests need to be reconsidered within the evaluation process:

A cognitive test... the main one they use, it's outdated. They tweak a few things but it's outdated because kids are so different now than they were. It's a whole new world with these kids, and they need to create something a little different.

Psychological and career impact. Although teachers believe that educators should consider students' home life during the evaluation process for special education placement (which may result in a solution for possibility of eliminating overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs), they also witnessed the devastating impact of being placed in a special education program has on the mental, educational, and career development of some Black students. Aset stated that she does not want children to grow up and think that they will not be successful because they are in a special education program:

We are labeling them. That grows up with them, and it ends up, it ties into their self-esteem. I feel like a child with low self-esteem is not going to give you their best, or be as productive in life as they could be. So, when we're putting kids [in special education programs] and labeling them, we have to look at not just for that moment, but for the long haul.

Aset believed that every child has something to offer. She concluded, "If you make a child feel like they have nothing, you are setting them up for failure." Cleopatra expanded on Aset's comment by stating that once the students are inappropriately evaluated, given a behavior disorder diagnosis and placed within special education, teachers do not always reevaluate them during their academic career. Thus, she believes the impact of being in special education causes the students to feel hopeless and

worthless. She stated, “They’re just stuck, and it’s labeled a certain way like they can’t do anything. Some end up committing crimes or is in jail or prison and has this attitude like, they don’t have self-worth or confidence.” She indicated that she feels sad when she sees so many Black males in special education. She believes they get stuck and “they never get out.”

The impact of a student being misdiagnosis with a special education label given to them may invoke negative thoughts and feelings in the student because their peers may harass them for having a special education label. Thus, students may endure hardship that they would not have endured if they were not inappropriately evaluated. Therefore, Cleopatra further paints a picture of thoughts that students may have when their peers become aware that they have a special education label:

In DC [District of Columbia], they have the bus [for children in special education programs]. And if you don’t take the bus, you walk or metro or whatever. So the understanding for the student was okay, I ride the bus. It’s special education so I’ll get made fun of. He rode with some of the pre-k students so he wouldn’t stand next to certain people. He’d hang out with his friends, and not wanting people to know I have a disability, you know. Yeah, I think at the younger level. You can’t really see, but that younger boy, he had a sense, you know. The kids are going to make fun of me if they see me on the bus. So, he didn’t want to be associated with having a label.

Most of the teachers expressed further concern on the impact that special education will have on the future of Black students upon completion of high school. The

teachers noted that many students in special education programs will receive a certificate of attendance and not a high school diploma. Sheba stated that when the students graduate within special education, “You don’t get a diploma, only a certificate of completion.” She added: “Ultimately, the greater good of our people and us being able to have some success stories and positive people in the community or the next generation of leaders will be affected.”

Nzingha realized that parents, whose child have been misdiagnosed and placed within special education programs, are surprised that their child is getting a certificate instead of a diploma. She shared that if the students were not misdiagnosed and kept within special education until graduation, they would be able to get a diploma, which could lead to attending college and receiving employment that requires a high school diploma. Nzingha strongly believes that it is devastating for a parent, who has sent his/her child to school, thinking that the child will earn a diploma but receive a certificate that says, “thank you for coming.” She further added:

Because, my thing is I feel like if children stay in special education, I try to tell parents you may not receive a diploma if they stay in this type of program. So you have a Black child not receiving a diploma; that's a problem. That's a problem to your community because it makes it very difficult for the children to receive a job. It's a problem for that child who can't find a job. They might consider other things to make money that may be illegal. That brings your property value down because you have crime in your area. All these things affect it goes further and

further and on top of that if your child is not reading, and were putting them in this placement that might be inappropriate for them.

Therefore, Nzingha truly wants to parents to focus on finding ways to transition their children out of special education, especially Black males:

I get very concerned about that, especially black males because I feel like, if they don't get rid of it [special education label] within a certain amount of time, it follows them; makes it difficult. And I always try to remind parents that a diploma is different for some students who have special needs. So you need to do whatever you can. If you can, try to and transition your child out of special education if they don't need it.

The teachers believed that poor evaluation methods are contributing factors for Black students becoming overrepresented in special education. They noted that because teachers may not understand various aspects of students' culture and home environment, they may evaluate the students and place them in special education without that knowledge of the student's culture and home environment. In addition, the teachers believed that students may face hardship and discomfort from their peers for having a special education label. This awareness has led educators to believe that impact of being inappropriately placed in special education can cause the students to feel hopeless and discouraged, leading to low self-esteem and criminal behavior.

Parent Support

All of the teachers believed that parents need a lot of support with helping their children through their academic journey. Furthermore, the teachers believe that lack of

support for parents can contribute to Black children being overrepresented in special education programs. Therefore the theme of parent support is a vital ingredient of Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives because it provides critical insight to help parents address overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs. In addition, the subthemes of knowledge and involvement as well as training and resources are investigated.

Involvement and knowledge. The teachers expressed how lack of parents' involvement in their children's education might lead to Black students being placed in special education. Makeda discussed how parents' lack of involvement in their children's education may motivate educators to not positively invest in their children's academic progress:

Well, the parent is the advocate for their child and I tell parents that all the time, especially with ADHD or with speech problems in which I can identify. That parent has to write, or that child will be warehoused; out of sight out of mind. If you don't have a strong parent advocate, those are the things that happen to our children, especially to our little men.

Cleopatra agreed with Makeda that parents must get involved in order to see progress with their child's academic performance. She stated, "I noticed professionals get together and say stuff [negative things about children]. But, unless the parents are involved, you don't really see change. Makeda further elaborated on how some parents do not show up to meeting to discuss their children's academic progress:

You also have to come to the meeting. The parents don't show up. There's no one there to sign off on the form; no one to say there's nothing wrong with my child. So the system is allowed to do what they think is best but may not be in the best interests of the child. So it has to be a joint effort between that classroom teacher and that parent and they must listen and be the protector.

But Sheba believed that the lack of involvement by parents maybe because some parents just do not have the knowledge to help their children with their education:

My students' home life, the background in which they come from. I know all my children are multiples. A lot of the parents are young, and they really don't play a vital role in their education from simply sitting down and doing homework or showing it's done. And I try to always give homework that they [students] are able to do without help, because they might not be able to help or read and say it's not the correct word. The parents may not have the skills to help.

In addition, Nzingha believed that parents' lack of knowledge on how to prepare their children with the tools that are needed for them to perform well academically may lead to their children lacking the basic knowledge for their academic grade level:

I believe that parents are not necessarily knowledgeable about all the things that the kids need to have when they come to school. I don't think that I'm very surprised these days that a lot of kids don't know their address, their phone number, their first, middle, last name, and their parent's last name. I asked what your mother's name is? Young children, I feel like they should know what their parents first and last name is. When I say what's your mom's middle name even if

they are five, that's unacceptable. When you're sending your child to a school, they should have tools already there.

All the teachers believed that it is vital to support parents by encouraging them to support and encourage their children. Teachers noticed that having a connection with the family helps them to understand more about the child and their home life. This connection may assist with parents getting more involved with their child's education. Cleopatra advocated for parents to get involved with their child's education, but she also realizes that some parents are going through a lot of personal issues, so "they are not thinking of their child, they are thinking about their next meal or violence or other things."

Hatshepsut believed that the entire family needs to be embraced by educators through multiple forms of communication:

One solution will be the schools making all parents to feel welcome, to come into the school to volunteer. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles- the entire extended family, any school system in America to make parents, families, to truly feel welcome.

Communication for teachers. When I say teachers, its administrators, the whole staff communicating- really doing their best to make the families feel that the school is sincere. I think it's a good idea to have communicating with them when they e-mail or call-getting back to them within 48 hours.

Nerfertiti furthers supported Hatshepsut comment on the importance of communicating and connecting with parents. She acknowledged how understanding a

child's home life may lead educators to reevaluation their decision for placing a Black student in special education:

That helps when you have that family piece or connection, you know maybe there's some issues going on with the child, not just that their not picking it up [comprehending]. Mom barely can read or there are no books at home.

Connecting with families also would help; it would give your insight. We also do a home visits, its way to get to know them early on, it helps with learning about their ability. I'm your child's teacher, I'm not the police or looking at anything, just checking to see if they need some crayons or paper. That connection piece would help too.

Training and resources. Although the teachers believed that building good relationships with parents are important, Cleopatra believed that parents need to participate in some type of training so they can advocate on behalf of their children who are in special education:

[I] think there needs to be some type of training. I know parents don't always go out of their house, but some push, someone needs to focus on educating the parents. It's sad to see some parents don't even have a clue, even at the IEP meetings, the parents just say "ok, ok," they don't ask questions. Some of the language the parents don't understand. I had a parent didn't know he was in a self-contained class. I've [parent] never seen his IEP.

Ptah supported Cleopatra's comments by stating how some parents come to IEP meetings, but they do not understand anything that is going on in the meeting. He

concluded, “They don’t know what’s been said or what it means. They just sign the paper, put up the safeguards, go to the last page of parental signatures.” Cleopatra further explained why it is important for parents to advocate for their children during IEP meetings instead of agreeing with the evaluator:

I think if it's someone who doesn't care. If it's an evaluator that says ok there not doing x, y z, well maybe they're not because there having a bad day. The parent might come in, and the parents just go along with it rather than say “wait this isn't right” and speak it. They [evaluators] might not be a good evaluator.

In addition to training workshops, the teachers believed that it is important to provide parents with resources and information that they can utilize at home to support their children’s academic progress. These resources may contribute to parents working toward eliminating their children from being placed in special education. Hatshepsut supports giving parents tips and strategies to implement at home with their children:

I've also let the parents know about things they can do at home, different activities, websites. In this computer age, our preschool children are savvy with computers. So I pass on shared information with parents with things they can do with everyday things to encourage language. I share examples with how they can have ongoing dialogue with their children in a way that can stimulate language skills. I give them ideas with how they can help children be more responsible, independent. Not just children but everyone feels proud and happy when they learn to do something new. I let parents know early on that I was working to help the children become more independent with their self-help care and they are

happily surprised. I give them tips on how they can reinforce them at home. Then, it's nice how the parents are at school, they see just how independent they are; they are so pleased. If you have those realistic and high expectations of the children; give those clear examples of what you're expecting they will raise to the occasion and they'll learn. And it's good, everybody's happy. I give tips and ideas and pass along other resources.

Nzingha also provides resources for parents that they can do with their child at home to help them academically:

I also try to talk to parents about things they can do with the child at home to help them get out [exit out of special education]. And I'll say, for instance, well you know they need to work on these things. And when these scores come up, you can try to get them out. Also, like I said try to explain to them if they continue on this track [in special education], this is the possibility of not having a diploma. There is a possibility, and I try to explain because a lot of parents don't realize that. So, by explaining that they have a different sense of urgency to try to do something with their child-tutoring and different things. And trying to make sure that I talk to community members about making sure their child is getting free stuff and services and activates to enrich their development and improve their education outcome.

All the teachers strongly believed that lack of parent support and lack of training and resources for parents contribute to overrepresentation of Black children in special education programs. They believed that parents have the power and influence to advocate

for their children. They recognized that parents need to spend time understanding their children's academic and personal growth and development, working with teachers to find ways of providing academic support to their children, as well as parents advocating against their children receiving inappropriate evaluations for special education placement. If parents are provided with resources and they utilize them effectively, they will be able to help their children exit out of special education.

Teacher Advocacy

The collective voices of the teachers indicated that they believe they should be agents of change and advocate for the elimination of Black students being overrepresented in special education. Sheba wants educators “to be in the front of changing the movement of referring the kids who don't have issues.” Thus, Ptah works in eliminating overrepresentation by “fighting that battle all the time.” He further explained, “I have got them out [of special education] as early as possible because if they make it to 5th, to a certain grade level, to middle school, that's it.”

Aset provided insight on how she advocates for her students who she believes does not belong in special education:

I'm raising two African American males. That's important to me that they grow up and be successful. I know if I can make a difference in their lives, I can instill values in other children. I enjoy teaching African American children. It is my ability to advocate for them to move beyond having that education as a part of their education process. So I guess if it's impacting my teaching, it does so as having documentation that they don't need special education, that's how it

impacts me. To work them so they can validate themselves as individuals who do not need to be in special education.

Tyie provides an example of a student that she works with that she believes does not belong in special education:

We're dealing with a case now with a child in the first-grade. The parents have a lawyer and they're bent on placing him in special education. Why would you want to do that? The child is no more slower than the average child; he's only in the first-grade, in the formation stage. So put him in there all day long? It's a disservice for the child's ability to make progress, without being surrounded by peers who require significant cognitive development. That's why I address children to help children who've been labeled as mild impaired, to advocate for their dismissal.

The teachers work really hard with developing and implementing solutions to keep Black students out of special education when they believe that they do not really need to be in it. Ptah tries to work with all educators about how to "look at the child all together before you just go and say that this child needs special education." In addition, Nzingha discussed how she utilizes her resources to help exit Black students' out of special education programs for mild disabilities:

So I'm just trying to make sure that I do this every year. That I look and try to find the kids who I can see, that I can get them exited [from special education] if we can, early. I try to find them and I try to make sure that I get the school community involved in making sure that were working with this child. And if I

see something on his testing that doesn't look right, I'll say to the parent, work with him on these specific things because this is where he was having the most difficulty with. I'll say to a regular general education teacher to work on these things to get everyone involved so when it's time to reevaluate, we can move forward and have him transition back into the regular general education classroom without special education support.

The teachers understood the importance of advocating against the overrepresentation of Black students in special education. They believe that it is their responsibility to make sure that Black students are exiting out of special education. They recognize that they must hold their colleagues accountable on providing resources and support that students need. More so, they believe that it is extremely important for students to transition back into general education classes in order for them to process successful on their academic journey.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter, I examined the collective voices of the teachers as it related to their perspectives of overrepresentation as well as solutions to eliminate overrepresentation. Four major themes emerged throughout the data: (a) knowledge of self, (b) student evaluations, (c) parents support, and (d) teacher advocacy. These themes and their subthemes highlighted the importance of Black teachers having cultural pride and knowledge, so they can build that pride and knowledge within the students; the impact that inappropriate assessments have on the personal and academic development of students success; the role that parent involvement has on the educational outcome of

students; and the importance of teachers being an advocate against Black students being overrepresented in early childhood special education. All of the teachers believed that although there were many factors that contribute to overrepresentation, their goal is to understand and utilize all necessary resources to help Black children exit out of special education.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate Black early childhood teachers' perspectives of Black early childhood students who are overrepresented in early childhood special education programs for mild disabilities. This investigation addressed two research questions: "What are Black early childhood education teachers' perceptions of overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for students with mild disabilities?" and "What solutions do Black early childhood teachers believe need to occur in order to eliminate the overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for students with mild disabilities?" Because there are a limited number of Black people's voices addressing issues and concerns in special education (Patton, 1998), a qualitative study was utilized to investigate Black early childhood teachers' experiences.

The teachers in this study were Black early childhood teachers, who had at least six years of teaching experience and were currently working with at least one child identified with a mild disability and receiving special education services. In addition, all participating teachers were certified and/or licensed to teach early childhood education. The findings from the analysis of the interviews produced four themes: (1) knowledge of self, (2) student evaluations, (3) parent support, and (4) teacher advocacy. In this chapter,

I discuss the findings from this study within the context of previous research. In addition, I present the limitations of this study, followed by implications and the conclusion.

Knowledge of Self

The emerging theme of knowledge of self-generated subthemes consisting of racial pride, cultural disappointment, and student involvement. Gregory and Mosley (2004) stated that teachers are now encouraged to understand their own racial identity. These teachers within this study embraced a deep sense of love and admiration for their racial identity. They embraced an even deeper sense of racial pride and solidarity for Black people and Black culture. Watt (2006) acknowledged the teachers' expression of their racial identity by conveying how important it is for Black people to understand how their racial identity shapes their attitudes and the decisions they make. Thus, Makeda, Sheba, and Ptah expressed their love and appreciation for the rich cultural heritage, legacy, and traditions of their Black ancestors. Sheba elaborated, "I appreciate who I am and I don't think anybody has any more of a rich heritage than I do, or we do as a culture." But Ptah explained further what he has learned regarding what his Black identity means to him. He stated:

I'm a Black man. Through experience [Black cultural experiences], I learned that I am resilient. I learned that I am dedicated and persistent. I learned that I have a lot of thoughts. I'm creative. I'm analytical. I'm inquisitive. And, I learned that I'm brave."

The teachers were invested in understanding the valuable contributions and traditions of their ancestors through a variety of activities that involved educational, professional, and spiritual growth and development. For example, they participated in cultural activities and celebrations, reading books about Black cultural life by Black authors, religious practices, Black organizations, and family celebrations. These findings are consistent with those from Cokley and Helms (2007) and Camp, Barden, and Sloan (2010). Cokley and Helms (2007) found that individuals with a strong racial identity were more acculturated to Black culture by engaging in Black socialization practices and by engaging in traditional religious beliefs. Camp, Barden, and Sloan (2010) concluded that students who had more central racial identities and less contact with other Blacks growing up and were more likely to cite race-relations as well as engage in behaviors to develop racial identity (race-oriented organizations and reading books about Black cultural experiences for choosing a HBCU.

Although the teachers expressed a sense of Black racial pride and appreciation for their Black culture, they also briefly shared their frustration and concern about the current state of Black people. Tyie, Aset, and Ptah believed that Black people have become hopeless and powerless with helping their community become successful; thus, creating a negative impact on Black culture and future generations. Aset provided her assessment regarding the impact by stating, “We have a mindset of that’s what they [White people] say- it’s right. And we don’t really search within ourselves to reach for another level. We’re not living to our full potential.”

But while experiencing painful challenges during his childhood years, Ptah explained how he holds his Black family responsible for contributing to some of his difficulties in understanding the positive aspects of Black culture life and his Black manhood identity:

[I] think that my family did it wrong. I think that I was made to fear society in a sense that everything was shown to me in the negative side of being Black rather than the positive side of being Black.

The teachers' concerns brought awareness toward understanding the internal struggles that they are experience as it relates to maintain a positive racial identity. This is why Watts (2006) stressed the importance of Black people seeking an internal understanding of themselves, so they can help improve their [Black people] conditions and realities. Also, Grills (2004) noted the importance of how understanding one's reality, culture, and epistemology allows for the illumination and liberation of one's own spirit. In addition, understanding one's reality is imperative for the liberation of one's spirit because it teaches "people about themselves, their history, their bodies, and their nature so that they can become self masters [master the knowledge of themselves]" (Farrakhan, p. 50).

Despite some of the concerns that Black teachers have with the current state of Black cultural life, the teachers were invested in helping Black people understand the greatness that lies within themselves as they maintained a Black conscious worldview of Black culture. This brings to light a deeper understanding of Rowe and Webb-Msemaji's

(2004) explanation of how embracing one's African psychology helps to provide the necessary tools to liberate the mental and spiritual consciousness of people of African descent. Therefore, Black teachers' love for their racial identity inspired them to establish an environment that would enable Black students' to embrace their racial identity.

Gay (2005) acknowledged that teachers' beliefs of themselves influence their identity and their instruction. Thus, Hatshepsut concurred with Gay's (2005) comments regarding teacher's belief by stating, "I feel like a Black teacher has to know who they are, know themselves to love themselves in order to treat [take care of] Black children well." Hatshepsut desire for wanting teachers to have a positive identity so that the children can have a positive identity, supports Suizzo, Robinson, and Pahlke (2008) belief that parents who have a strong positive racial identity will more likely socialize their children to have a positive and healthy racial identity.

Ford (2012) stated that understanding Black culture has helped teachers become more cultural responsive to meet the needs of Black students. Therefore, Sheba feels that it is her calling to educate Black children because "this is all that I want to do." Also, she believed that teachers must believe in the students' ability to succeed. Similar to Sheba, Nzingha really enjoys educating children who look like her as well as working with them and seeing them maximize their full potentials. She stated, "I try to remind them that they are beautiful or capable, they are smart; that they can do whatever they want to do with hard work, persistence, and that sometimes life situations aren't great." Because Nzingha embraces the students' cultural pride, she believes that she can motivate them to excel

academically. This belief aligns with those of Nzingha as well as Lonnquist, RB-Banks and Hurber (2009), who stated that culturally competent teachers help promote higher learning outcomes for students. In addition, Sheba and Nzingha embodied the notion that teachers strive to confirm their students' cultural identity and draw upon culturally related beliefs and behaviors in the design and delivery of instruction, leading toward students becoming comfortable with seeking assistance with their academic performance (Neal, McCray, & Webb-Johnson, 2001; Tyler, Yzquierdo, Loez-Reyna, & Flippins, 2004).

As it relates to role modeling, Talbert-Johnson (2001) and Tyler, Yzquierdo, Loez-Reyna, and Flippins (2004) agreed that Black teachers are vital to Black students because they act as role models. The teachers supported the authors because their desire to be great role models for the students enabled them to talk about being a positive and powerful example just as much as they would want someone else to be a positive and powerful example for their children. For example, Hatshepsut noted that she wants to be the kind of teacher that she would be to her children. Likewise, Sheba also embraces the notion of her being a role model by stating, "I constantly think about what I'd want my child to see, learn, [and] do."

Therefore, teachers must understand how their cultural views may contribute to overrepresentation of Black students in special education (Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009). These teachers' investment and love for their culture and their students inspired them to become committed with challenging against issues and concerns that support overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. As Aset

stated, “I enjoy teaching African American children. [I need] to work them so they can validate themselves as individuals who do not need to be in special education.”

Student Evaluations

The teachers revealed the emerging theme of student evaluations, which provided an in-depth understanding of the impact that inappropriate behavior labels, background knowledge and tests, and psychological and career outcomes contribute to overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. There are many Black students who are overrepresented in special education programs who were inappropriately evaluated and identified as having a mild disability (Dunn, 1968; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). A major contributor or precursor to the inappropriate evaluation and identification is the teacher referral process (Cullian & Kauffman, 2005; Moore, 2002; Skiba et al., 2006; William, 2007)

Some teachers are referring Black students to special education based on their negative perceptions about Black culture and language (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003), which can lead Black students toward being overrepresented in special education (Mandell, Davis, Bevans, & Guevara, 2008; Moore, 2002). Many of the teachers questioned how students are being evaluated by educators, who may not be referring students based on the criteria for special education. Cleopatra stressed that “maybe there needs to be a lot of focus on going into the classrooms and seeing who’s working with the kids and see how they are being evaluated.” Cleopatra’s observation paralleled with Moore’s (2002) findings, which revealed that teachers who do not

understand the criteria for special education referral or disability definitions may result in teachers making inappropriate referral decisions.

In addition, many of the Black students are over-diagnosed under the category of emotional disturbance within special education programs (Gardner & Miranda, 2001). Some of the teachers within this study believed that many educators rush to place Black students who exhibit behavior problems in special education programs because the teachers do not want to take time to work with the students. Williams (2007) concluded in his study that some of the Black parents indicated that their child was mislabeled when they sent their child to the school psychologist. After meeting with the school psychologist, the child was referred to special education. One parent stated:

When I got the report back, I was furious. It was a typical white woman's view of a Black man. It said he was depressed, that he could do harm to himself. The recommendation was for BEH-behaviorally and emotionally handicapped (p. 254).

Cleopatra agreed with Williams's (2007) study that evaluators tend to place students in special education programs rather than work with them, especially with Black males. She stated, "I think sometimes if a kid misbehaves, "oh they are special education"... I think it's easier to place someone there rather than work with them."

Cleopatra further states, "For evaluators, I think it's like this idea if you're a black boy you're bad. If you're active, you're bad." Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) agreed with Cleopatra's statement by concluding that teachers need to question and

investigate the extent that behavior issues of Black students are related to their misunderstanding of Black culture. Both perspectives support the study conducted by Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003), which revealed that the teachers rated African American students' cultural movement styles as lower in achievement, higher in aggression, and more likely to receive special education services than students with standard movement styles.

Fenning and Rose (2007) noted that once school personnel perceive Black students as not fitting in the social and behavioral norm of the school, the school personnel fear losing control of their classroom; therefore, Black students are labeled as troublemakers and targeted them for removal. Aset supports Fenning and Rose (2007) research, discussing that some teachers do not have time to include different instructions for students with behavior challenges. Aset stated, "When they [students] interrupt the teachers, you [teachers] want to let them go [place them in special education] because their interfering with what you have set planned."

When behavior challenges are the focus of concern, teachers must examine behaviors in their cultural context of involvement parents or others that know their culture (Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-Zanartu, 2005). Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) stated that evaluators for special education placement need to be knowledgeable of students' cultural background as well as understand the impact that socio-cultural perspectives have on behavior and school performance. Aset acknowledges the comments made by Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) as valid because she

believes that “it takes time getting to know a child and to find out what things are affecting their life. Some point we have to in order to not just label them so quickly.”

While Nerfertiti also supported Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) by emphasizing how she believes that Black students’ home environment should be included in their evaluation for determining special education placement, Cleopatra focused on how environmental sources of stress that occur within their home can also lead to the students not performing well academically:

A big factor is the home environment. Drugs, home life, some of it’s social. Some kids never have a sense of home. There's a lot of stuff going on whether it’s violence, drugs, alcohol; so kids acting out. Some kids are born with delays. I think a lot has to do with the home though.

More so, the teachers noted that the use of biased tests is a major factor that contributes to overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. Nzingha elaborated in-depth how educators’ lack of knowledge about Black students’ home environment may lead toward educators’ misunderstanding of Black students response on evaluation tests, which may further contribute to the students being placed in special education programs:

Well, with my experience in early childhood, I noticed that a lot the screenings and the norms of how testing created is based off a larger population, which is Caucasian. And some things, our children in certain neighborhoods are not exposed to. For instance, I recognize that one of the reasons why our kids are

being overrepresented is that the stuff isn't necessarily culturally relevant for them.

Nzingha wanted "individuals who are doing the screenings and everything to understand that different cultures have different knowledge and experiences." She continued by adding:

Please, if you're evaluating children who's lived in the city, who's never seen a tractor, who's three or four years old, please don't hold that against them. But ask them something they might have seen. Make it appropriate for them."

Nzingha comments align with Shiba, Knesting, and Bush (2002) research, which noted stated that lack of exposure of People of Color to information on test items may result in those test items being bias.

Although the teachers talked about the influence of test bias on overrepresentation, the teachers also talked about the career and psychological impact that having a special education label has on Black students. Most of the teachers expressed concern on the impact that special education will have on the future of Black students upon completion of high school. Sheba stated that when the students graduate within special education, "You don't get a diploma, only a certificate of completion." She added, "Ultimately, the greater good of our people and us being able to have some success stories and positive people in the community or the next generation of leaders will be affected."

Nzingha mirrored Sheba's statement by noting, "So you have a Black child not receiving a diploma. That's a problem. That's a problem to your community because it makes it very difficult for the children to receive a job." Although Sheba and Nzingha discussed the impact of not having a diploma will have on the student's career goals, Aset discussed the impact of having a special education label has on a student's self-esteem:

We are labeling them. That grows up with them, and it ends up, it ties into their self-esteem. I feel like a child with low self-esteem is not going to give you their best, or be as productive in life as they could be.

Sheba, Nzingha, and Aset's comments are consistent with the research of Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson and Kerns (2009), Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002), and Artiles and Ball (2008). Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson and Kerns (2009) stated that Black students with EBD label have challenges in adult life, especially difficulty with obtaining and maintain employment and poor interpersonal relationships. In addition, Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002), and Artiles and Ball (2008) discussed that having a special education label negatively impacts Black students' self-esteem, motivation as well as educational and career goals.

Parent Support

The emerging theme of parent support explored parents' lack of involvement in their child's education, the lack of knowledge that parents have in order to help their child matriculate in the educational system, and the need for teachers to provide parents with training and resources pertaining to their child's academic progress.

The teachers' voices support researchers who have suggested that parents' lack of involvement with their child's academic development and progress is a contributing factor to overrepresentation (Dykes, 2008; Kearns, Ford, & Linney; 2005). Dykes (2008) discussed a case study using a qualitative method to explore strategies, policies, and procedures that were being implemented to eliminate the overrepresentation of Black students in special educations at three East Texas elementary schools. Similar to the concerns of the teachers in this study, the findings concluded that lack of parent involvement was a contributing factor of overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs.

Kearns, Ford, and Linney's (2005) findings revealed that the top three factors when examining disproportionate representation of Black students in special education were lack of parent involvement with their child's education), pressure from parents and teachers to place Black students in special education, and the failure of special education and regular education school systems. These findings are also similar to the teachers concerns and Dykes's (2008) findings.

The teachers' findings were not consistent with Williams (2007). While the teachers discussed that parents are not involved in IEP meetings, Williams (2007) investigation from four Black parents' perception of school efficacy in the community that they lived concluded that the school personnel misused and abused the protocol. For example, according to IDEA, "the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is supposed to be written by parents, teachers, and administrators who know the child. When parents get to

the IEP meetings (in Wallace County), the IEP is already written. They read it to you, turn it toward you, and say sign it” (p.255)

Nevertheless, Sheba believes that the lack of involvement by parents may be because some parents just do not possess the knowledge to help their children with their education. In addition, Nzingha believed:

I believe that parents are not necessarily knowledgeable about all the things that the kids need to have when they come to school. I don't think that I'm very surprised these days that a lot of kids don't know their address, their phone number, their first, middle, last name, and their parent's last name.

The teachers' perspectives were consistent with Neal, McCray, and Webb-Johnson (2001) and Shippen, Curtis, and Miller (2009). While Neal, McCray, and Webb-Johnson (2001) noted that some students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may come to school with the skills that are required of mainstream education, Shippen, Curtis, and Miller (2009) specifically concluded that there is a lack of parent involvement. They stated that some parents do not know how to help their child with school work so the school system has a responsibility to positively affect their students' school progress.

Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, and Robinson-Zanartu (2005) noted that promoting family involvement as well as building relationships with the community is vital for the effective education of Black students. Also, Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) emphasized that educators should establish interaction and

communication with the child's families as well as recognize the individual strength and cultural perspectives of the family. All the teachers concurred with Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, and Robinson-Zanartu (2005) and Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) by suggesting that it is vital to encourage parents to work with support their children. Hatshepsut stated that the entire family needs to be embraced by educators through multiple forms of communication:

Communication for teachers. When I say teachers, it's administrators, the whole staff communicating- really doing their best to make the families feel that the school is sincere. I think it's a good idea to have communicating with them when they e-mail or call-getting back to them within 48 hours.

Although the teachers believed that building good relationships with parents is important, they recognized that they must find ways to encourage parents to become involved with their child's development and with their education. They also believed that parents need training and resources so they can advocate against their children being placed in special education. Cleopatra believed that parents need to participate in some type of training so they can advocate on behalf of their child who is in special education:

[I] think there needs to be some type of training. I know parents don't always go out of their house, but some push, someone needs to focus on educating the parents. It's sad to see some parents don't even have a clue, even at the IEP meetings, the parents just say "ok, ok," they don't ask questions. Some of the

language the parents don't understand. I had a parent didn't know he was in a self-contained class. I've [parent] never seen his IEP.

In addition to training workshops, the teachers believed that it is important to provide parents with resources and information that they can utilize at home to support their children's academic progress. Hatshepsut supports giving parents tips and strategies to implement at home with their children. Also, she talks to parents about ways that they can help their child become more responsible and independent.

Nzingha also provided academic resources for parents so that they can work with their child at home:

I also try to talk to parents about things they can do with the child at home to help them get out [exit out of special education]. And I'll say, for instance, well you know they need to work on these things.

The teachers' perspectives supported Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum's (2005) and Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery's (2002) findings regarding the importance of educators helping parents to understand the school's culture so they may be better equipped with resources to addresses issues and concerns. Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) conducted a focus group study regarding community leaders' perceptions of contributing factors to special education referral and placement. The results concluded that the lack of support to assist students and families in navigating the school's cultural systems were contributing factors to special education referral and placement. In addition, Salend, Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) stated not only should

educators engage in a variety of activities that can increase their awareness and understanding of the cultural perspectives of students and families, but educators can provide training to families regarding issues related to overrepresentation.

Teacher Advocacy

The emerging theme of change agent provided insight and knowledge on the teachers' commitment to help students exit out of special education. The collective voices of the teachers indicated that they believe they should be agents of change and advocate for the elimination of Black students being overrepresented in special education. Sheba wants educators "to be in the front of changing the movement of referring the kids who don't have issues." Thus, Ptah works in eliminating overrepresentation by "fighting that battle all the time."

Aset provided insight on how she advocates for the students who she believes do not belong in special education:

So I guess if it's impacting my teaching, it does so as having documentation that they don't need special education, that's how it impacts me. To work them so they can validate themselves as individuals who do not need to be in special education.

In addition, Nzingha discussed how she utilizes her resources to help exit Black students' out of special education programs for mild disabilities:

So I'm just trying to make sure that I do this every year. That I look and try to find the kids who I can see, that I can get them exited [from special education] if we can, early.

The teachers validated research that was supported by Lonquist, RB-Banks, and Hurber (2009), Liang and Zhang (2009), and Tyler, Yzquierdo, Loez-Reyna, and Flippins (2004). These teachers agreed with the research that states some teachers are aware of how their racial identity impacts their relationship with students as well as helping them address topics of social justice and equality (Lonquist, RB-Banks, & Hurber, 2009). Furthermore, teachers that are conscious of their own cultural competence may become very committed to social justice and equity issues (Liang & Zhang, 2009). Tyler, Yzquierdo, Loez-Reyna, & Flippins (2004) stated that diverse special education teachers who are aware of overrepresentation will investigate and challenge inappropriate referrals and placement.

Limitations

The limitations for this study were as followed: (a) perceptions of early childhood teachers were the only perceptions included, (b) the region of the country was limited to District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, (c) there were no observations of the teachers interactions with parents or students, (d) the teachers were interviewed only one time, (e) documents pertaining to student's referral to special education were not included, and (f) teachers knowledge regarding special education policies and laws (e.g. accurate knowledge about certificates vs. diplomas) were not assessed in this study.

Implications

This study used a qualitative research methodology to investigate the perceptions of Black early childhood teachers on overrepresentation in special education. Throughout the study, four themes emerged regarding teachers' perception of overrepresentation: Knowledge of Self, Student Evaluations, Parent Support, and Teacher Advocacy. Results gathered from these themes may enlighten educators and parents about overrepresentation of Black early childhood children in special education programs. Many people may be unaware of strategies, challenges, and solutions that impact teachers, parents, and children who are affected by Black children in special education programs. The findings in this study can be used for Black racial identity and Black cultural competency for educators, parent workshops that address issues concerning overrepresentation and child growth and development, and programs and activities that will be implemented by students, parents, and educators that address Black cultural responsive practices for Black students' academic success.

In addition, future research is needed to further investigate how overrepresentation is perceived by additional stakeholders as well as investigating what solutions should be implemented to eliminate Black children from being overrepresented in special education programs for students with mild disabilities. The variety of stakeholders included for further research would allow for more in-depth understanding of overrepresentation. Also, the impact that Black teachers' racial identity has on their working relationship with Black students should be furthered investigated. This information may offer additional recommendations on cultural specific methods on how

to eliminate overrepresentation for Black students. Although the teachers believed that lack of parent involvement contributes to overrepresentation, the teachers also believed that parents are motivated and dedicated to working with their child toward their academic success. They understand that parents strive to provide the best educational opportunities for their child. In addition, the teachers realized that it is their responsibility to continue to build a great working relationship with parents and the community. Therefore, future research is needed to investigate teachers' perception of parents', families', and communities' socialization factors. This investigation might help to eliminate the general trend of teachers blaming parents for their lack of involvement with participating in their child's education.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to understand the perspectives of Black early childhood teachers regarding overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs because research has not adequately addressed overrepresentation solely from the voices of Black early childhood teachers. The highlight of this study was hearing the passion and determination that the teachers have to do whatever they can to eliminate Black students from being overrepresented in special education. The collective voices of the teachers echoed a passion and desire to advocate on behalf of Black students. They believe that it was their responsibility to challenge the injustices that they faced. The teachers' beliefs parallel the research on critical race theory.

Critical race theory in education is an approach that People of Color use to eliminate racial problems (Solorzano & Tosso, 2000). The teachers understood the impact that racism has had on keeping Black children overrepresented in special education programs. Critical race theory addresses the inequalities and injustices within the education system (Taylor, 2006). It investigates discriminatory practices and policies that may hinder Black students from gaining access to resources. Critical race theory allows for Black teachers' voices to be heard as they relate the impact of racism on Black students in special education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The teachers within this study were allowed to tell their stories through their own personal lens. They shared their desire to provide Black students with all the necessary resources and support that would allow the students to become successful. They wanted to make sure that Black students have equal access to all resources. The teachers exhibited love and passion for teaching Black students because they wanted to see them maximize their full potentials. Therefore, this study provided the venue for Black early childhood teachers' to share their perspectives on how racial identity impacts their desire, commitment, and passion to work with Black students. In addition, it provided an opportunity to examine how their perspectives on critical issues in educating Black students, specifically the overrepresentation of Black students in special education, can create strategies to advocate against the injustices and inequalities that promote overrepresentation.

While looking through the lens of critical race theory, the teachers conveyed their understanding of the struggles and conditions that impact overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs. They showed their understanding of the realities

of racism within education. This study provided the teachers' voices to be heard as they discussed their perspectives of overrepresentation. The teachers revealed their perspectives on the injustices within the special education system in ways that highlighted concerns and issues related to overrepresentation of Black students in special education. The teachers were able to address and challenge their racial identity, the injustices of assessments, and the lack of parent involvement. This study provided the collective voices of Black early childhood teachers' perspectives of overrepresentation in special education programs. More specifically, this study not only provides information on contributing factors that impact overrepresentation, but it also addresses solutions teachers believe may be used to eliminate overrepresentation. Finally, this study can be used to help educators, researchers, policy makers, students, families, and community leaders generate knowledge and solutions that can help investigate and eliminate overrepresentation of Black early childhood students in special education programs for mild disabilities. Thus, there is a strong need to prepare culturally competent early childhood educators (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009; Miller & Fuller, 2006.).

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APPENDIX A

Initial Codes

Negative images	Empowerment	Discussions	Absent father figure	Parent training
Lack morals/values	Building relationship	Activities	Racial discussions	Behavior issues
Lack of value for education	Self-efficacy	Contributions	Sense of identity	Behavior
Loss of culture information	Positive image	Fear of being Black	Encouragement	Behavior problems
Passive	Ancestors	Survival strategies	Self-awareness	Behavior concerns
Low standards	Appreciative	Hardship	Study history	Home life
Mistrust	Knowledgeable	Hard life	Race relations	Home environments
Powerless	Inequalities	Lack of positive affirmation	Educated	Environment cultural
Need to be self-identified	Negative influence	No guidance	Family history	Home challenges
Royalty	Attend events	No father image	Complex feelings	Home life issues
Self-love	Holidays	Lack cultural consciousness	Self-connected	Lack of knowledge
Strength	Educating	Confusion of manhood	Relating	Lack of relationship building
Pride	Acknowledgement	Lack of understanding racism	Painful image	Funding
Integrity	Large amount	Negative role models	Creative curriculum	Parent advocacy
Proud	Advocacy	Exiting out	Academic problems	Lack of parental assistance
Richness	Proactive	Uncomfortable	Child preparation	Parental knowledge of process
Greatness	Advocate	Labeling	Extra support	Parental school awareness
Joy	Supportive	Teacher isolation	Value	Submissive parents
Satisfaction	Teacher advocacy	Rapid placement	Teacher detachment	Child preparation
Relating	Lack of support	Labeling impact	General ed	Parent's

			teachers lack knowledge of special ed	priorities
Career passion	Questioning	Ashamed	System lack of knowledge	Test bias
Positive image	Prevention measures	Self-destruction	System revitalization	Lack of counseling
Enjoy	Discrimination	Positive transference	Lack of system support	Lack of resources
Natural	Racism	Educational containment	Parent's legal assistance	Cultural differences
Pride	Negative perception	Educational impact	Legal assistance	Teacher lack of knowledge
Self-love	Financial incentives	Educational/career impact	Misdiagnosis	Cultural competent
Self-relating	General ed teachers giving up	Educational reward	Assessment process	Class size
Isolations	General ed teacher's time constraints	Proper placement	Poor assessment	Activities
Positive self-image	Teacher's giving up	Improper placement	Misguided assessments	Teacher retention
Cultural reverent	System problem	School misplacement	Assessment	Parent education
Over-populated	Rush assessments	System conflicts	Bad evaluator	
Parent involvement	Parent comfort.	Reevaluate progress	Parent orientation	
Family involvement	Encouraging parents	Teaching strategies		
Resource support	Effective communication	Tutoring		
Resources	Connecting with family	Academic assistance		
Community	Teacher assistance	Goal setting		
Support System	Passion	Poor parent communication		
Emphases on performance	General Ed receiving special ed training	Parent communication		
Competent Test	Knowing the child	Parent education		
More teaching time	Teacher's creativity	Safe zone		
Relationship Building	Different tests	Diversity training		
Knowing the child	Cultural sensitivity	Support for teachers		
Evaluating the evaluator	Competent Teachers	Enhance curriculum-base assessments		
Psychological impact	Cultural responsive teaching	Addressing students' needs		
Publicity	Teacher support	Parent education		

APPENDIX B

Codes Refined

Self-love	Negative perception	Positive self-image	Educational containment
Strength	Self-connected	Cultural reverent	Educational impact
Pride	Relating	System problem	Educational/career
Proud	Painful image	Labeling	Home environments
Positive image	Creative curriculum	Rapid placement	Home life issues
Fear of being Black	Satisfaction	Rapid assessment	Lack of knowledge
Survival strategies	Relating	Misdiagnosis	Home life
Hardship	Positive image	Poor assessments	Lack of relationship building
Lack of positive affirmation	Enjoy	Behavior issues	Financial incentives
No guidance	Natural	Behavior problems	Parent advocacy
Confusion of manhood	Pride	Test bias	Lack of parental advocacy
Negative role models	Self-love	Labeling impact	Parent advice
Racism	Self-relating	Self-destruction	Parental knowledge of process
Discrimination	Isolations	Psychological impact	Parental school awareness

Submissive parents	Family involvement	Resources
Child preparation	Emphases on performance	Reevaluate progress
Parent training	Competent test	Exiting out
Parent orientation	Home life evaluation	Proactive
Parent comfort	Knowing the child	Parent education
Encouraging parents	Evaluating the evaluator	Parent involvement
Effective communication	Different tests	General ed receiving special ed training
Connecting with family	Cultural competent	
Child preparation	Advocate	
Goal setting	Advocacy	
Parent information	Teacher assistance	
Parent support	Passion	

APPENDIX C Themes

Final codes into categories which generated four themes:

Knowledge of Self, Evaluations, Parent Support, and Teacher Advocacy

KNOWLEDGE OF SELF: any statement that includes self-reflection and awareness of one's self.

(includes the following categories: self-pride, lack of support, sense of responsibility and investment)

SELF-PRIDE: any statement that includes personal satisfaction for one's achievements.

(includes the following codes: self- love, strength, self-pride, proud, and positive image)

Self-Love: any statement that includes one's well- being and happiness.

“I love me, I love being black, being an African American.”

Strength: any statement that includes a person being strong during their experiences.

“I feel like with that, that empowers my manliness... it's like, being black, a black man, strengthens my bones as a man, I'm not just any man, I'm a black man.”

Strength: any statement that includes a person being strong during their experiences.

Through experience, I learned that I am resilient. I learned that I am dedicated, persistent. I learned that I have a lot of thoughts. I'm creative, I'm analytical, I'm inquisitive, and I learned that I'm brave, I go out there. I don't care what you want

to do; I will do what I want to do. What you won't do, I will do. I believe that's because I'm black. When you tell me no I will say go, and I will say yes, you can't tell me no, that's what comes to mind. You will never tell me no and I accept no. If I think yes is the answer, yes is what you will receive. So that part about being black, I guess that makes me stronger than just being a man.

Pride: any statement that includes personal satisfaction for one's achievements.

"I don't have a problem with my identity, you know. I appreciate who I am and I don't think anybody has any more of a rich heritage than I do, or we do as a culture."

Proud: any statement that includes personal satisfaction for one's achievements.

I'm proud of my racial identity. I believe I'm good, I'm a leader, I'm positive, I'm spiritual. I haven't thought about being anyone else. So, my identity is all that I have. I've never been ashamed to be black or thought about how it would be to be someone else or how my life would be different.

Positive image: any statement that includes possessions of healthy qualities.

I mean I'm a black woman. I see greatness of black people that I know and dealing with my students. I try to create an atmosphere where they know there culture, heritage, and who they are, so they can be the greatest of who they are. So it's positive.

LACK OF POSITIVE SUPPORT : any statement that includes absence of assistance.

(includes the following categories: fear of being Black, survival strategies, hardship, lack of positive affirmation, no guidance, confusion of manhood, negative role model, discrimination, racism, negative perception)

Fear of being Black: any statement that includes unpleasant emotions of one's identity.

It's sensitive in the sense that I think my mother did it wrong. I think that my family did it wrong. I think that I was made to fear society in a sense that everything was shown to me in the negative side of being black rather than the positive side of being black.

Survival strategies: any statement that includes methods to continue to live.

'What she did not say about how to be a black male and be successful in this world, couple that with how the world will perceive you by being a black male.'

Hardship: any statement that includes severe suffering.

So it was more so like you have these options, like okay, you will need to complete high school because, and when you go to high school, it's four times as hard, even though I went to an all-black high school. You need to work four times as hard because when you go to college, when you go out to society, you won't get the job or you won't get it because of the fact that your black, or you will be looked down upon because you're black. You would have to work just triple times more than the white man beside you're based on the simple fact that you're black.

Lack of positive affirmation: any statement that includes the absence of affirming someone.

“There was no rooted or grass roots of being black, or understanding that I’m black that I’m beautiful or powerful because I’m a minority in this world. I have the majority of this world.”

No guidance: any statement that includes no direction or support.

“But there was no uncle, no father that said this is how you do this or this is how you do that with all the power and tools you have- take that and channel it and tunnel it this way.”

Confusion of manhood: any statement that includes uncertainty of being a man.

I never really thought about what it means to be black for myself as it reflects me as myself. I never thought of myself, never looked in the mirror and said, “I am a black man and what does that means?” Like I know what it means, but I don’t know what it means to me. Like if I just took all the odds out of life and just looked in the mirror and said I am a black man, I wouldn’t know what that means.

Negative role models: any statement that includes people who do not have a desirable image.

“I didn’t have an example of what it means to be a black man because all my uncles did drugs; my father wasn’t in my life; my mother went from man to man.”

Discrimination: any statement that includes unjust treatment.

Because to me it’s just like addressing juvenile injustice, it’s like the same thing, there are some black men or black girls who should not be in jail. They’ve got convicted of crimes they did not necessarily do, and it’s the same thing in special education.

Racism: any statement that includes race prejudice and power.

It's just plain, I mean without sugar coating it, it's just plain racist, and you know when you over represent the children with special needs and special education by saying that there incapable, and you over represent them in prisons, to me in black and white, for lack of better words just seems racist.

Racism: any statement that includes race prejudice and power.

I just can't understand why it's so easy for children to be identified as specially educated, specifically black men. It's so hard for them to go to college, yet once again it's very easy for them to go to prison. It just seems to me flat out racist.

Discrimination: any statement that includes unjust treatment.

“For evaluators, I think it's like this idea if you're a black boy you're bad. If you're active, you're bad. I think it's easier for them to say they are black; little boys aren't going to amount to anything.”

Negative perception: any statement that includes people who do not have a desirable awareness.

Some people feel that black boys are not prone to being good students because they feel like those boys want to disrupt the class and fight, and this is from the teachers mind. So it's sad that at the beginning of a school year when this teacher has these negative perceptions before the first day of school. It will definitely have a bad impact on their impact with the students and their delivery of instructions. Sometimes, they'll dummy down, talk down to the children nor have the high expectations, or ask those higher order thinking skilled questions.

SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND INVESTMENT: any statement that includes

accountability and involvement.

(includes the following categories: self-connection, relating, painful image, and creative curriculum)

Self-connected: any statement that includes establishing a relationship with one self.

“I was already a mother at the time. My philosophy was I wanted to be the kind of

teacher for what I'd teach my own children. So, I feel a strong sense of responsibility.”

Relating: any statement that includes connecting or identifying with someone or something.

I constantly think about what I'd want my own child to see, learn, do and I thought I've thought that before. But now, I really own it because it's real and I think children need that. They are lacking those positive rules and the nurturing is missing.

Painful image: any statement that includes a distress perception.

I can see the lack of levels of reading and understanding and experiences that they may have or receive and to live in the nation's capital and not know what certain buildings are, and not be able to recognize certain buildings, not know who these individuals are, have students look at Abraham Lincoln and call him Dr.

King...it's disheartening to listen to third graders... and have them talk about the civil war but then ask the questions, like later on, how did black people get there in the first place?

Creative curriculum: any statement that includes innovating of comprising a course of study.

A black man to teach the students about how we got here, which is not a part of the textbook of course and then when it is in the textbook its only like about a paragraph. So lucky they have a teacher like me to say, hey this is what happened.

PASSION FOR PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT: any statement that includes desire to satisfy one self.

(includes the following categories: satisfaction, relating,, positive image, enjoy, natural, pride, self-love, self-relating, isolation, positive self-image, cultural relevant)

Satisfaction: any statement that includes fulfillment of one's wishes.

"I wouldn't want to teach a whole class of another race personally, I wouldn't."

Relating: any statement that includes connecting or identifying with someone or something.

I'm raising two African American males. That's important to me that they grow up and be successful. I know if I can make a difference in their lives, I can instill values in other children. I enjoy teaching African American children.

Positive image: any statement that includes possessions of healthy qualities.

They see so much negativity in the world. They need to know there's something positive out there. Everybody's not just on drugs, everybody's not robbing and killing. There are actually black people who are doctors and lawyers, in those

types of positions. They need to know that. They are surrounded by so much negativity so I enjoy teaching them

Enjoy: any statement that includes pleasure in.

“You know I really enjoy teaching children who look like me. I've enjoyed working with them and seeing them grow. I've enjoyed really just seeing what their possibilities are.”

Natural: any statement that includes something that is caused by nature.

“I always wanted to teach black children, I feel like that's the calling. Black teachers with black kids.”

Pride: any statement that includes personal satisfaction for one's achievements.

“Well, when I have black students, I want them to know who they are and be proud of it.”

Self-love: any statement that includes one's well-being and happiness.

I feel like a black teacher has to know who they are, know themselves, to love themselves in order to treat black children well because I've seen in general in the world- who had a low opinion of themselves and they were not happy, they were depressed or something and they could not give all they could to other people, so I hope I'm making myself clear, so for example, a person who is not in tune with their own blackness, or who doesn't like being black would not be a good teacher for children because they have a low opinion of what it means to be black.

Self-relating: any statement that includes connecting or identifying with someone.

I think I look at them as my own child, and I have set a high standard for learning for him. I also set that standard for them and because I identify with them. I, too, came from a single parent home and when I moved from the country my mom

worked in convenience stores. So we lived in not the best neighborhoods. So I identify and know what they're going through. So knowing the barriers that they might face, it's what helps me because I myself remember my African American teachers picking me up because they knew my mom was at work. I struggled with math. I had that teacher who'd drive me home. And from what was given to me, I in turn want to give that to someone else. So, maybe that's why I do what I do.

Isolations: any statement that includes withdrawal from a location.

“Because I remember growing up in a predominately white area and I remember not feeling represented. I really felt isolated and I don't ever want my students or my children down the road to ever feel that way, ever.”

Positive self-image: any statement that includes possessions of healthy qualities of one's self.

Whenever I'm working with students, I always make sure the stuff we are doing is culturally relevant. I always like to use individuals who represent them in the best way. So if we're talking about character traits, I make sure that I pull a character who's interesting or a person whose interesting like Michelle Obama.

Cultural relevant: any statement that includes something that embraces a culture.

Making sure that what we're learning is representing them because I don't feel like they can get a full grasp until they feel like the information involves them, that it is representative of them. I try to make sure that the information is relevant to their everyday lives.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS: any statement that includes making a judgment about the value of someone.

(includes the following categories: assessments, future impact, education/career impact child home life)

ASSESSMENTS: any statement that includes estimation of the ability of someone.

(includes the following categories: system problem, labeling, rapid placement, misdiagnosis, poor assessments, emphasis on performance, competent test, evaluating the evaluator, different tests, behavior issues, behavior problems, test bias)

System problem: any statement that includes uncomfortable situation with an institutional environment.

Well, I've been teaching 13 year and over these years, it's like special education has become a dumping ground for children with behavioral problems. First, you start to notice how it affects academics and it's so frustrating when you see because that's the answer... so the first thing they do or first intervention is, were going to write it up.

Labeling: any statement that includes identifying someone.

I'm angry about it because no one with the powers that be, no one wants to hear why the children why their underperforming or are acting out or being referred. They just want to put a label on it, and move on.

Rapid placement: any statement that includes a quick response putting someone in a particular place.

I think sometimes if a kid misbehaves, “oh they are special education”... I think it’s easier to place someone there rather than work with them. I think it’s really hard for black males to grow up nowadays.

Rapid assessment: any statement that includes a quick to an estimation of the ability of someone.

“If we give them a label that will fix the situation. It depends on who's giving the evaluation. It's easier to put a label rather than come up with strategies to give to the parents.”

Misdiagnosis: any statement that includes an inappropriate evaluation.

A lot of children who are receiving services from where were from, they want to say 'oh there ADHD, but they’re not. That’s why we have so many because people don’t know how to channel that behavior. I think it’s a behavior thing, and people don’t know how to address them so they just label them. They are not really special education, but the kids are not getting the help they need.

Misdiagnosis: any statement that includes an inappropriate evaluation.

“I know there's a process at an early stage where they get screened, and go by one assessment. One kid may not be comfortable with a screener and might not respond. So they'll use that and say the child is delayed.”

Poor assessments: any statement that includes unpleasant estimation of the ability of someone.

Being said about him, it’s poorly written in my opinion, it has nothing that says anything about the child no background data, no caring performance or levels of

understanding or any of that stuff, no present data, nothing actively being said. I need to go and learn this child from myself and I need to time do this. I can just sign the paper, put it in a file with everybody else and go on teaching, and that's how just how it happens and nobody talks about it.

Emphasis on performance: any statement that includes importance of carrying out an action.

“Put more emphasis not on testing but on what those children need to be able to be able to perform; what they need to know or should have in order to do.”

Competent Test: any statement that includes a reliable evaluating instrument measure.

Cognitive test... the main one they use, its outdated. They tweak a few things but it's outdated because kids are so different now than they were. It's a whole new world with these kids, and they need to create something a little different.

Different tests: any statement that includes instrument measure that is not similar to any other instrument measure.

I believe there needs to be a standardized test but should not be the end all or determining factor of decisions because the children show how they learn in different ways and in test taking, it's a tax for a lot of children. You have to be taught how to take a test and perform under the clock, with precision and to be a critical thinker. And you don't have the time within the classes to really teach children that and now there testing them younger and younger. So a solution would be to give different kinds of tests, functional tests not just academic, or

observations. Longitudinal tests where you can test the progress not just from year to year, all the months within the school year.

Behavior issues: any statement that includes an individual conduct that is concerning to someone else.

This just how I see it, I'm different. Maybe that's because I'm always working with behavioral problems; I'm the disciplinary, so they give me these children but I can handle it. There not special, they're just bad and they need some redirecting.

Behavior issues: any statement that includes an individual conduct that is concerning to someone else.

You find they give them special education because of behavior issues, and for mild disabilities, or considered to be mild... but their using a suspect because of their behavior, they not always be focused and get something so there is an over representation there, to young children.

Behavior problems: any statement that includes an individual conduct possess a negative concern to someone else.

Another child that I had last year in kindergarten, what's wrong with him? He was stubborn when he was little so they gave him special education and said maybe there would be problems, and he is just as keen in his problem solving. He writes letters in reverse; is he dyslexic? No, but he's in special education.

Test Bias: any statement that includes an unfair instrument measures.

Well, with my experience in early childhood, I noticed that a lot the screenings and the norms of how testing created is based off a larger population which is

Caucasian and some things, our children in certain neighborhoods are not exposed to. For instance, I recognize that one of the reasons why our kids are being over represented is that the stuff isn't necessarily culturally relevant for them.

Test Bias: any statement that includes an unfair instrument measures.

A lot of times they don't get the opportunity to see a tractor so you have a child that might be scored down for something like that and that of course... or other things that they might have going on, like the kite. A lot of kids don't know what a kite is in this area. And until people recognize that those things are represented in evaluations and that they ultimately harm children who are not exposed to those things, then it hurt kids and over represents them.

FUTURE IMPACT: any statement that includes conditions that affects someone beyond the present moment.

(includes the following categories: labeling impact, self-destruction, psychological impact)

Labeling impact: any statement that includes the implications of identifying.

For me, I don't want children to grow up thinking that just because they've been labeled as something they can't be successful. It touches my heart. Despite being labeled, everyone has something they can offer, whether it's a little bit. Everybody has something. If you make a child feel like they have nothing, you're setting them up for failure.

Self-destruction: any statement that includes process of cause damage to one's being.

I hate to see wasted potential. I feel that a child that was stagnated or boxed in early on and has gone through school dumb down, and not put to their best of abilities; such a tragedy. It's a tragedy for everyone because that child could have been so much more than what they were expected to.

Psychological impact: any statement that includes implication of one's mental state of being.

“Once there in special education it's so hard to get out. There just stuck, and it's labeled a certain way like they can't do anything. Some end up committing crimes or is in jail or prison and has this attitude like, they don't have self-worth or confidence.”

EDUCATION/CAREER IMPACT : any statement that includes implication of one' academic or job related achievements.

(includes the categories: educational containment, educational impact, educational/career impact)

Educational containment: any statement that includes preventing academic achievement.

It's important because it's sad to see so many black males in special education. Sometimes, they do get stuck in special education and they never get out. I guess trying to find a way to ensure they are not stuck in there from pre-school on to 12th grade.

Educational impact: any statement that includes implications of academic achievements.

“A certificate of attendance you can't get a job with that. You won't have any achievements on your report card. We can't afford that. We have lost too many children in that way. We can't keep putting our children there.”

Educational/career impact: any statement that includes implication of one' academic or job related achievements.

Because, my thing is I feel like if children stay in special education, I try to tell parents you may not receive a diploma if they stay in this type of program. So you have a black child not receiving a diploma that's a problem, that's a problem to your community because it makes it very difficult for that child to receive a job. It's a problem for that child who can't find a job, they might consider other things to make money that may be illegal. That brings your property value down because you have crime in your area. All these things effect it goes further and further and on top of that if your child is not reading, and were putting them in this placement that might be inappropriate for them; that always might determine with the reading scores and things they all do, it determines so many other plans for our countries prisons and all those things. Our focus resources, all those things need to be focused on making sure that all children are able to read. But I have a particular sensitivity to black children and more specifically black males because I know there being over represented.

Educational impact: any statement that includes implications of academic achievements.

I try to make sure that I educate individuals. Tell them to watch out and be aware. And if we do get a child just to kind of monitor and see is this paper really reflecting what this child is capable of doing. And I also try to remind the parent of this is what the final product will be if he stays on this path. If it's on specific special education program path, I try to let them know the possibilities so they aren't surprised. A lot of parents are surprised, and that's concerning if you're a parent and you've been sending your child to school every day thinking they're going to get a diploma and they get a certificate that says "thank you for coming;" that's devastating.

Educational/career impact: any statement that includes implication of one's academic or job related achievements.

Because I know in the long haul, our children, with special education when you graduate, you don't get a diploma only a certification of completion. That's real, they need a diploma. That's the first step to achieve anything in this world. It's a cycle in education and it's just bologna to a bigger issue and I see the dropout rate which contributes to it. And ultimately, the greater good of our people and us being able to have some success stories and positive people in the community or the next generation of leaders will be affected.

CHILD'S HOME LIFE: any statement that includes a young human below the age of puberty who's identifies with their residential living arrangements

Home environments: any statement that includes residential living conditions.

“They didn’t eat. Somebody was killed in front of their house. Their father died last night, or mom was hit in the school and they have dirty clothes or some of them are soiled.”

Home life issues: any statement that includes challenges from their residential living conditions.

Factors, a big factor are the home environment. Drugs, home life, some of it's social. Some kids never have a sense of home. There's a lot of stuff going on whether its violence, drugs, alcohol, so kids acting out. Some kids are born with delays. I think a lot has to do with the home though.

Lack of knowledge: any statement that includes the absence of understanding.

“This girl was in a broken home. She was living with her grandmother and she didn’t do her homework because her grandmother didn’t understand enough to help other. There are so many things that factor into being over represented.”

Home life: any statement that includes residential living conditions.

My students’ home life, the background in which they come from. I know all my children are multiples, a lot of the parents are young, and they really don’t play a vital role in their education from simply sitting down and doing homework or showing it’s done. And I try to always give homework that they are able to do without help, because their might not be able to help or read and say it's not the correct word. The parents may not have the skills to help.

Lack of relationship building: any statement that includes the absence establishing connections with people.

You've got to find out what's going on with the child in the home and that contributes to their behavior. If I don't build a relationship of trust, then they won't tell me they don't have insurance to be able to take them to the doctor, to find what the real problem is. You must be able to identify the child, figure out for yourself what you think those needs are, bring in the parent and talk to them about what's going on. Build a relationship so the child feels safe and can share, and build a relationship with the parents so they will share what they think the needs are and will trust you. The sooner we find out what's wrong with the child, the sooner we can help.

PARENT SUPPORT: any statement that includes providing assistance to an adult.

(includes the following categories: lack of parent engagement and knowledge, parent training/support, parent involvement)

LACK OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE: any statement that includes the absence of adult participation and understanding.

(includes the following categories: parent advocacy, lack of parental advocacy, parental knowledge of process, parental school awareness, submissive parents, child preparation)

Parent advocacy: any statement that includes adults addressing injustices.

Well, the parent is the advocate for their child and I tell parents that all the time, especially with ADHD or with speech problems in which I can identify. That parent has to write, or that child will be warehoused; out of sight out of mind. If

you don't have a strong parent advocate, those are the things that happen to our children, especially to our little men.

Lack of parental advocacy: any statement that includes absence of adults addressing injustices.

You also have to come to the meeting. The parents don't show up. There's no one there to sign off on the form; no one to say there's nothing wrong with my child. So the system is allowed to do what they think is best but may not be in the best interests of the child. So it has to be a joint effort between that classroom teacher and that parent and they must listen and be the protector.

Parent Advice: any statement that includes adults providing guidance or recommendations concerning prudent future action.

Parents need more assistance, more education. When I say education, I mean ... like, tips and information on how they can better help their child succeed in school. They need advice on how to contact the school and get results, to go up and not be confrontational. But, to speak to the administration in a way they'd be more likely to listen and help them.

Parental knowledge of process: any statement that includes adults understanding steps taken in order to achieve a particular end.

I believe some parents come to meetings and don't understand any of it; they don't know what's been said or what it means. They just sign the paper, put up the safeguards, go to the last page of parental signatures.

Parental school awareness: any statement that includes adults understanding of the educational environment.

“Until you educate mom and dad about how to do things, not to mention what’s coming down the pipe and become the core and how that’s a new area for teachers now.”

Submissive parents: any statement that includes an adult who is conforming to someone’s authority.

“Parents accepting what the school system is saying about their child. And their lack of knowledge that there are other methods that can be used.”

Child preparation: any statement that includes process of developing a young human below the age of puberty.

I believe that parents are not necessarily knowledgeable about all the things that the kids need to have when they come to school. I don’t think that, I’m very surprised these days that a lot of kids don’t know their address, their phone number; their first middle last name and their parents last name. I asked what your mother’s name is. Young children, I feel like they should know what their parents first and last name is, when I say what’s your mom’s middle name even if they are five, that’s unacceptable, when you’re sending your child to a school they should have tools already there.

Child preparation: any statement that includes process of developing a young human below the age of puberty.

I feel like we need to have more community events and different things to let parents know these are the things your kids need to know. I also believe that are

pediatricians are getting co-pays, there not showing and going through the developmental milestones with parents. They're not talking about what a child should be able to do, and I don't think that, I think that even when child enrolls in school the previous year, like they enroll right before the summer starts, they should receive a packet of ... these are the things your child needs to know before they come to kindergarten. We're not doing a good job of explaining and were putting all the responsibility on professionals who only work with children for about six hours a day, and that's just unacceptable.

PARENT TRAINING/SUPPORT: any statement that includes educating and helping adults.

(includes the following categories: parent orientation, parent training, parent comfort, encouraging parents, effective communication, connecting with family, child preparation, goal setting, parent information, parent support, parent education)

Parent orientation: any statement that includes providing information to adults.

I think there needs to be some type of training. I know parents don't always go out of their house, but some push, someone needs to focus on educating the parents. It's sad to see some parents don't even have a clue, even at the IEP meetings, the parents just say "ok, ok," they don't ask questions. Some of the language the parents don't understand. I had a parent didn't know he was in a self-contained class. I've never seen his IEP.

Parent orientation: any statement that includes providing information to adults.

We have parent orientation. I want to get to know them and explain what the programs are. We have workshops. It's the teacher taking their time to do that and bring the parents in. And those are things we have to do if you want them to understand what they're doing.

Parent training: any statement that includes educating adults.

Giving parents a resource, some training in order to help their children. I think a lot of my parents do not know how to help their children. They want to but they don't know how to and basic things. You would assume as a mother, it's not there. At my school, we don't have any support for our parents besides sending a flyer about a meeting.

Parent orientation: any statement that includes providing information to adults.

I've even done some parent workshops about how you need to know and how you need to understand your child because in some cases, I may know your child better than you. Because I've spent a lot of time with your child in and out of school. I've taught him or her throughout the day. Then your son is also in after care with me and I've had conversations about them.

Parent orientation: any statement that includes providing information to adults.

“Ok, it's the relationship, to build one with the child and the family, so they understand what our needs are and why I'm saying what I'm saying and what the program is all about.”

Parent orientation: any statement that includes providing information to adults.

“The parent workshops are something that we’ve done so they can understand the new kindergarten.”

Parent orientation: any statement that includes providing information to adults.

I try to keep in touch with my parents and have workshops and let them know this is not the kindergarten that you or I have had, it's a whole new program. And you have to be involved and that will help the child.

Parent comfort: any statement that includes making an adult feel satisfied.

One solution will be the schools making all parents to feel welcome, to come into the school to volunteer. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles- the entire extended family, any school system in America to make parents, families, to truly feel welcome.

Encouraging parents: any statement that includes motivating an adult.

“Support parents, inviting and encouraging them to encourage their children and other students.”

Effective communication: any statement that includes good relationship building and understanding.

Communication for teachers. When I say teachers, its administrators, the whole staff communicating- really doing their best to make the families feel that the school is sincere. I think it’s a good idea to have communicating with them when they e-mail or call-getting back to them within 48 hours.

Connecting with family: any statement that includes establishing a relationship with a group of people.

That helps when you have that family piece or connection, you know maybe there's some issues going on family with the child not just that their not picking it up. Mom barely can read or there are no books at home. Connecting with families also would help; it would give your insight. We also do a home visits, its way to get to know them early on, it helps with learning about their ability. I'm your child's teacher, I'm not the police or looking at anything, just checking to see if they need some crayons or paper. That connection piece would help too.

Child preparation: any statement that includes process of developing a young human below the age of puberty.

You give them opportunities and different ways whether it's through Skype, or being physically there or with phone calls. I think it calls them to step up, but making resources like community events and block parties and things to educate the community about what people and what children need to be ready for school. Then that way, when you do come to school they won't be behind, because people have the information.

Goal setting: any statement that includes establishing a vision for your future.

Meeting with parents and kids together just to try to come up with different things we could do at home and at school because it does no good to do something in school and go home at act a fool. It defeats the purpose.

Parent information: any statement that includes providing resources for adults.

“During IEP meetings, explain to the parents they don't have to be in special education. That it's a stepping stone to general education.”

Parent support: any statement that includes providing information for adults.

I've also let the parents know about things they can do at home, different activities, websites. In this computer age, our preschool children are savvy with computers. So I pass on shared information with parents with things they can do with everyday things to encourage language. I share examples with how they can have ongoing dialogue with their children in a way that can stimulate language skills. I give them ideas with how they can help children be more responsible, independent. Not just children but everyone feels proud and happy when they learn to do something new. I let parents know early on that I was working to help the children become more independent with their self-help care and they are happily surprised. I give them tips on how they can reinforce them at home. Then, it's nice how the parents are at school they see just how independent they are; there so pleased. If you have those realistic and high expectations of the children; give those clear examples of what you're expecting they will raise to the occasion and they'll learn, and it's good everybody's happy. I give tips and ideas and pass along other resources.

Parent Education: any statement that includes providing knowledge to adults.

I also try to talk to parents about things they can do with the child at home to help them get out. And I'll say, for instance, well you know they need to work on these things, and when these scores come up, you can try to get them out. Also, like I said I try to explain to them if they continue on this track, this is the possibility of not having a diploma. There is a possibility, and I try to explain because a lot of

parents don't realize that. So by explaining that they have a different sense of urgency to try to do something with their child. Tutoring and different things, and trying to make sure that I talk to community members about making sure their child is getting free stuff and services and activates to enrich their development and improve their education outcome.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT: any statement that includes adult's engagement.

(includes the categories of parent involvement and family involvement)

Parent involvement: any statement that includes adults' engagement.

I noticed professionals get together and say stuff. But, unless the parents are involved you don't really see change. Some of the parents are going through things. There not thinking of their child, there thinking about their next meal or violence or other things.

Parent involvement: any statement that includes adults' engagement.

I feel like there should be an interview with the parent, a requirement of a parent for participation in schools. And I think that parents need to be a little bit more proactive about working with the students and not necessarily giving the full responsibility to a system or a school for educating a child.

Family involvement: any statement that includes a group of people's engagement.

The families being more actively involved as opposed to just seeing it as a way to get a check. I can't believe are so willing let a school system label their child as

needing specialized instruction because they don't understand, they could give the extra help.

Parent involvement: any statement that includes adults' engagement.

The parents need to be advocates for their kids because they just go with the flow, no one challenges or asks questions. People's thought processes are different.

Some parents use schools like a daycare, not like their learning. Some use it as a break from their child, so their mindset of education. They don't have a sense of value of it

TEACHER ADVOCACY: any statement that includes educators addressing injustices.

(includes the following categories: advocate, advocacy, passion, teacher support, reevaluate process, exiting out, proactive)

Advocate: any statement that includes addressing injustices.

"Maybe more people working with, going into the communities and really working with kids. Someone who's looking to get them out of special education rather than just perpetuating the cycle."

Advocacy: any statement that includes continuation of addressing injustices.

My role is to build capacity by removing barriers that significantly impair you doing academics in literacy and numeracy literacy. And if you don't have any barriers, what are you doing seeing me? So to maximize equity opportunities to learn your need to be with a regular educator and peer collaborates. Peer collaborates, where you can construct meaning, new ideas. Because if you mildly

and mixed up with a severely, something is not going to go. You can't get new ideas from it.

Passion: any statement that includes a strong controllable emotion and desire.

Weeding out people who really don't have a passion for this because you don't want anything to come and rock your boat because you already don't want to be there. Teachers who don't want to really be there, it's not their passion. That's a detriment to all the children; all kids. That one teacher, we all had her.

Teacher support: any statement that includes providing information to educators.

"I think more importantly, I've tried to work with my coworkers, general education, special education teachers, and people about how to look at the child all together before you just go and say that this child needs special education."

Advocate: any statement that includes addressing injustices.

So I'm just trying to make sure that I do this every year that I look and try to find the kids who I can see, that I can get them exited if we can, early. I try to find them and I try to make sure that I give the school community involved in making sure that were working with this child, and If I see something on his testing that doesn't look right I'll say to the parent, work with him on these specific things because this is where he was having the most difficulty with. I'll say to a regular general education teacher to work on these things to get everyone involved so when it's time to reevaluate, we can move forward and have him transition back into the regular general education classroom without special education support.

Reevaluate progress: anything that includes assessing again someone's stage of development.

"If I see a child is doing well and who is in special education and I noticed there doing better than the evaluation is saying. I reevaluate them in."

Advocacy: any statement that includes continuation of addressing injustices.

"I have got them out as early as possible because if they make it to 5th, to a certain grade level, to middle school that's it."

Exiting out: any statement that includes eliminating a situation.

"My goal is to see them get out of special education."

Proactive: any statement that includes the process of continuous engagement.

"I'm making sure I'm checking the signs to see if they really need my service because my whole goal is to get them out. That's my goal."

Advocate: any statement that includes addressing injustices.

It is my ability to advocate them to move beyond having that education as a part of their education process, so I guess if its impacting my teaching, it does so as having documentation that they don't need special education, that's how it impacts me. To work them so they can validate themselves as individuals who do not need to be in special education.

Advocate: any statement that includes addressing injustices.

Because why would, were dealing with a case now with a child in the 1st grade, the parents has a lawyer and their bent on placing him in special education. Why would you want to do that? The child is no more slower than the average child;

he's only in the 1st grade, in the formation stage, so put him in there all day long it's a disservice for the child's ability to make progress, without being surrounded by peers who require significant cognitive development. That's why I address to children to help children who've been labeled as mild impaired, to advocate for their dismissal.

Advocacy: any statement that includes continuation of addressing injustices.

“You need to be in the forefront of changing the movement of referring the kids who don't have issues”.

APPENDIX D
Recruitment Letter

Greetings!

My name is Raymond Shorter, and I'm a doctoral student in the Early Childhood Program at George Mason University. You are being invited to participate in a research study exploring the relationship between Black early childhood teachers' perspectives and special education. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to investigate Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives regarding the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs for children with mild disabilities. In order to participate in this research study, you must answer yes to all of the following six questions:

1. Do you identify your race as Black?
2. Do you teach in one of the following grade levels: pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, or 3rd grade?
3. Are you certified and/or licensed to teach early childhood education?
4. Do you currently work with Black early childhood students who has an identified mild disability and who receives special education services?
5. Do you believe that there is a problem with Black children being overrepresented in early childhood special education for children for mild disabilities?
6. Do you have at least one solution to eliminate overrepresentation of Black children in early childhood special education for children for mild disabilities?

Your views are important, and I am hopeful that the findings of this research study will help to gain a better understanding of Black teachers' perspectives. The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Raymond Shorter

Doctoral Candidate

George Mason University

APPENDIX E
Interview Questions

1. What is your perception of Black culture?
2. What is your perception of Black people?
3. How do you celebrate Black culture?
4. How were you socialized as a child in understanding your cultural?
5. What are your perceptions of your racial identity?
6. What are your thoughts about teaching Black students?
7. How does your perception of your racial identity impact your role as a teacher working with Black children?
8. What are your perspectives of Black students being overrepresented in early childhood special education programs for mild disabilities?
9. How does your understanding of overrepresentation impact your ability to teach Black children?
10. Why is addressing overrepresentation important to you?
11. What factors contribute to overrepresentation for black children in special education programs?
12. Give examples of solutions that you believe can help eliminate Black students from being overrepresented in special education programs?
13. Give examples of solutions that you have tried to the elimination Black students from being overrepresented in special education programs

APPENDIX F
Demographic Survey

1. Type of Teacher

Special Education General Education

2. Grade Level

Pre-Kindergarten Kindergarten 1st Grade 2nd Grade 3rd Grade

3. List any certifications or licenses

4. Zip Code

5. Type of School

Public Private Charter

6. Years of Teaching

1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20 or more

7. Year of Teaching in Early Childhood Education

1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20 or more

8. Gender

Male Female

9. Age

21-31 32-42 43-53 54-64 65-75 76 and over

10. Highest Level of Education

Bachelors Masters Doctorate

Black Early Childhood Teachers' Perspective of Overrepresentation of Black Children in Special Education

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to investigate Black early childhood education teachers' perspectives regarding the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs with mild disabilities. The information gained from this study will be used for a Ph.D. dissertation in the field of Early Childhood Education. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief survey containing nine demographic questions. After completing the survey, participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than a possible increased awareness of cultural identity and social justice advocacy.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used instead of your real name. Your name will not be included on the surveys and other collected data. A code will be placed on the survey and other collected data. Through the use of an identification key, the researcher will be able to link your survey and other collected data to your identity. Only the researcher will have access to the identification key.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. A \$20 gift card will be given to you after the completion of the interview.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Raymond Shorter at George Mason University. He may be reached at xxx-xxx-xxx for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may also contact his faculty advisors, M. Susan Burns (xxx-xxx-xxxx) or Julie Kidd (xxx-xxx-xxxx). You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the

research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

Name

Date of Signature

Version date: November 27, 2013



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: December 19, 2013

TO: Julie Kidd
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [544863-1] Black Early Childhood Teachers' Perspective of Black Children in Special Education

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: December 19, 2013

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the ORIA prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Bess Dieffenbach at 703-993-4121 or edieffen@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

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