

## ABSTRACT

MANNS, LONNIE DARNELL CECIL. Exploring the Educational Experiences of Autistic Black Youth: A Multiple-Case Study Analysis (under the direction of Dr. Jamie Pearson and Dr. Crystal Lee).

This multiple-case study explored the educational experiences of three Black autistic youth, which they described through their first-person, parental, and service-provider perspectives. The study examined how the youth described their relationships with their teachers and schools. Over the course of 4 months, the researcher conducted interviews, administered questionnaires, and reviewed individualized education programs. The overarching goal of this study was to gain first-person insights from Black autistic youth about their own experiences through their own words. This study was one of the first to capture the first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth regarding their lived educational experiences. The study contributes to research on autism and builds the sparse research base regarding Black autistic youth first-person educational experiences. The results indicate that the Black autistic youth in this study were primarily educated in self-contained settings from elementary to high school, a practice long associated with adverse outcomes. Additionally, Black autistic youth educational experiences included negative incidents, such as unmet school-service needs, segregated classrooms, and deficit-based support. However, themes of positive educational experiences were also present in the data, including the impact of significant others, positive student–teacher relationships, and affiliative humor. Additionally, parental shielding, or overprotection, was found to have both protective and prohibitive effects on students. While this study sought to elicit the voices (i.e., perspectives, thoughts, and beliefs) of autistic youth, as in previous work, the voices of parents were the most evident. Finally, this study demonstrated that Black autistic youth can and must be included in autism research in the future; although this has been previously recommended by

other researchers, it has yet to be applied in practice. The implications for educators and researchers are discussed.

© Copyright 2023 by Lonnie D. Manns

All Rights Reserved

Exploring the Educational Experiences of Autistic Black Youth:  
A Multiple-Case Study Analysis

by  
Lonnie Darnell Cecil Manns

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Teacher Education and Learning Sciences

Raleigh, North Carolina  
2023

APPROVED BY:

---

Dr. Jamie N. Pearson  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Dr. Crystal C. Lee  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Dr. Lisa Bass

---

Dr. Brian Boyd

---

Dr. Henry L. Johnson

## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to Marjorie B. Manns, Eljay D. Manns, Tameka E. Manns, Grace Manns, Cecil Manns, Woody Turner, Clyde Phillips, and my dear Aunt Billie, Dr. Wilhelmina Manns. Till we meet again.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Lonnie D. Manns earned his Bachelor of Arts from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, where he double majored in Psychology and English. Lonnie later earned a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Boston University and a Master of Business Administration from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Lonnie spent 17 years working in American corporations before he decided to move into education full-time. Lonnie also earned a Master of Arts in Special Education from North Carolina State University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a special thanks to Donna Barrett from Linmoor Middle School. Mrs. Barrett, when you saw me sitting in the office in trouble, you asked, “What is the matter?” You walked me from the office to your classroom and said, “I am tired of all the Black boys getting in trouble and not the White kids.” You told me the pen was mightier than the sword and made me write, and writing has carried me ever since. I will never forget when you showed up at Linden McKinley High School, came to my classroom, and asked me why I had a “B” on my report card. I could not believe you just showed up that day and pulled me out of class in front of everyone. As a child, I remember thinking, “This is one crazy lady.” But your expectation of excellence demanded better of me. Expectations matter. I still have the picture of you at my Kenyon College graduation. Thank you for changing my life.

To my wife, Dr. Stephenie Takahashi Manns, and kids, Lonnie Darnell Cecil Manns, Jr., Livia Marjorie. Manns, and August Stephen Manns, I know I have spent years in the classroom and hours at this computer writing. Thanks for supporting my dreaming.

To Dr. Jamie N. Pearson, thank you for the experience working in the FACES Lab and the opportunity to gain experience presenting at national conferences and publishing. To Dr. Crystal Lee, thank you for introducing me to Paulo Freire and for the opportunity to write and present with you. To my committee, Dr. Bass, Dr. Boyd and Dr. Johnson, thank you for your guidance, insights and tutelage. I appreciate all of your advice and feedback during this process.

To Valencia Hicks-Harris, Brittani Clark and Kia Allah I have learned so much from you on this journey. Thank you! Miranda Dalton thanks for being the best study partner. Jennifer Mann, I have enjoyed getting to know you.

Lastly, to Keith Saxton, Luke Testa, Aaron Hamilton, and Tyler Griffin my life has benefitted from having brothers like you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	ix
List of Figures .....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
State of Research .....	3
Autism Prevalence .....	3
Autism and Race .....	4
The Ignorance of Race and Ethnicity in Autism Research .....	5
White Disability .....	6
Educational Experiences of Black Autistic Youth .....	7
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions .....	8
Theoretical Framework .....	8
Identity-First and Person-First Language .....	10
Definitions .....	11
Significance of the Study .....	12
Conclusion .....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	14
Conceptual Framework .....	14
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion .....	16
Theoretical Framework .....	21
DisCrit .....	21
DisCrit Tenets .....	22
The Social Model of Disability .....	24
Review of the Literature .....	27
Qualitative Case Study and Autistic Black Students .....	29
The Historically Racialized Educational Landscape .....	31
Blackness as Disability .....	32
Expectations and Student Outcomes .....	33
Research on Black Families with Autistic Youth .....	36
Eliciting Autistic Youth Voices .....	38
First-Person Perspectives of Autistic Youth .....	40
Tools for Eliciting Autistic Students' Voices .....	42
Conclusion .....	45

Chapter 3: Research Methods .....	46
Research Design.....	46
Multiple-Case Study .....	47
Positionality .....	48
Research Procedures .....	49
Recruitment, Participants, and Sampling.....	49
Setting.....	52
Data Collection .....	53
Youth Voices .....	56
Parents’ Voices .....	58
Teacher/Service Providers’ Voices.....	58
Interview Protocol.....	60
IEPs.....	61
Data Analysis.....	61
Quality Indicators.....	63
Case Record .....	64
Ethical Considerations .....	65
Conclusion .....	65
Chapter 4: Findings.....	66
Case Descriptions.....	67
Case Study 1: Tasha Wilson .....	67
Case Study 2: Lance Jones.....	82
Case Study 3: Quan Miller.....	88
Cross-Case Analysis .....	98
Conclusion .....	105
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	107
Positionality Revisited .....	108
Revisiting My Conceptual Framework.....	109
Historical Educational Experiences of Black Youth. ....	111
Dis/ability Critical Race Studies.....	114
The Educational Experiences of Black Autistic Youth .....	116
Implications for Educators.....	117
Implications for Researchers.....	120
Implications for Policy.....	122

Limitations .....	124
Addressing Educational Equity Through Scholarship and Policy .....	125
Suggestions for Research .....	126
Conclusions .....	127
References .....	128
Appendices .....	162
Appendix A Research Procedures .....	163
Appendix B Recruitment Flyer .....	164
Appendix C Parental Phone Screening .....	165
Appendix D Parent Pre-Interview Survey .....	167
Appendix E Parent Demographic Questions .....	169
Appendix F Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (AFEQ) .....	170
Appendix G Interview Protocol .....	174
Appendix H My Teacher and Me Questionnaire .....	175
Appendix I Asset-Based Questionnaire .....	177
Appendix J Me at School Activity .....	178
Appendix K Friendship and Disclosure Questions .....	179
Appendix L Teacher Questions .....	181
Appendix M Interview Cards .....	182

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Youth Participants' Demographics</i> .....	51
Table 2 <i>Parent Participant Demographics</i> .....	52
Table 3 <i>Youth Interview Details</i> .....	53
Table 4 <i>Consolidated Data Sources Across Participants</i> .....	55
Table 5 <i>Examples of Code and Theme Development</i> .....	63

## List of FIGURES

Figure 1 <i>Conceptual Framework</i> .....	14
Figure 2 <i>Historical Architecture of the Educational Experiences of Black Students</i> .....	35
Figure 3 <i>Historical Educational Experiences of Black Youth</i> .....	47
Figure 4 <i>Data Sources for Research Questions</i> .....	54
Figure 5 <i>Youth, Parent, and Teacher/Service-Provider Voices and Data Sources</i> .....	56
Figure 6 <i>Research Questions, Data Collection Tools, and Theoretical Framework</i> .....	59
Figure 7 <i>Case Study 1: Tasha Wilson—RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?</i> .....	73
Figure 8 <i>Case Study 2: Lance Jones—RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?</i> .....	85
Figure 9 <i>Case Study 3: Quan Miller—RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?</i> .....	94
Figure 10 <i>Conceptual Framework</i> .....	110

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Black youth with disabilities are vulnerable to negative educational experiences and outcomes (Abudu & Miles, 2017; Diemer et al., 2022; Proffitt, 2022). Black autistic youth may be especially vulnerable to negative educational outcomes given the characteristics or traits of autism, which may intersect with the historically racialized educational landscape, which suggests a plethora of disparate negative outcomes (Artiles, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2020; Young et al., 2018). However, little is known about the specific educational experiences of Black autistic youth and few, if any studies exist that reflect first-person accounts. The voices of Black autistic youth are absent from the academic literature. For this reason, there is a need to understand the experiences of Black autistic youth.

The academic literature has suggested that Black children historically experience delays in autism diagnoses compared with their White peers (Dababnah et al., 2018; Mandell et al., 2002), which can be as long as 3 years (Constantino et al., 2020), as well as delays in accessing intervention and support services (Howard et al., 2021; Ramclam et al., 2022). This is problematic because early diagnosis and intervention can yield substantial improvements in social symptoms (Gabbay-Dizdar et al., 2022). Furthermore, early and intentional support have the potential to improve academic trajectories and postsecondary outcomes (Fleury et al., 2014). Black autistic children receive significantly less augmentative and alternative communication intervention time (Pope et al., 2022) and a lower quality of overall health care than their White peers (Magaña et al., 2012). E. G. Williams et al. (2022) noted “elevated risk factors for depression” (p. 3740) amongst Black autistic youth compared with their White peers, although autistic youth in general experience higher instances of depression than their neurotypical peers.

Research has suggested that autistic youth in general experience higher rates of school expulsion, starting in preschool (Blacher & Eisenhower, 2023), and some studies suggest that Black autistic children experience higher rates of suspension than their White autistic peers (Krezmien et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2014). School expulsions and suspensions increase the likelihood of negative outcomes for these students in the future (Blacher & Eisenhower, 2023; Gerlinger et al., 2021). Suspension and removal from classroom environments during their initial foray into educational spaces are particularly harmful to these students. Blacher and Eisenhower (2023) asserted that “removing autistic children from the linguistically and socially enriched preschool environment is orthogonal to their developmental and educational needs, with potential downstream adverse effects on their education, social, and linguistic development” (p. 180). During a critical developmental period when they are learning social and academic skills, suspending autistic children is especially harmful to their development, especially during preschool (Blacher & Eisenhower, 2023). When autistic youth are suspended, they lose the opportunity to learn from peers. The potential benefits of peer modeling for autistic youth have been established for several decades (Egel et al., 1981).

Peer interactions with teachers and other students can provide powerful models for autistic youth to learn how to interact and communicate in socially acceptable ways. This can help autistic youth to learn how to express themselves, their perspectives, and their voice. The suspension of Black autistic youth can have a cumulative negative impact on their long-term educational prospects (Rosenbaum, 2020). Further research is needed to understand both the effects of school suspensions on Black autistic youth and the educational influence of self-contained classrooms, which also remove Black autistic youth from general educational settings. There is a lack of academic research examining the lived experiences of autistic Black youth and

their families (Lewis et al., 2022), especially from the youth' perspectives. An understanding of the educational experiences of Black autistic youth can shed light on opportunities to improve experiences and outcomes for these students.

While an increasing number of studies investigate student well-being, few studies have focused on understanding the well-being of autistic students in particular (Danker et al., 2019). Moreover, little is known about the well-being of Black autistic youth. However, it is known that Black students, in general, face daunting challenges due to persistent systemic hurdles within the educational system. Given the complexity of autism, the risk profiles of students with disabilities, and the historically disparate treatments and outcomes for students of color, it is vital to shed light on the first-person experiences of Black autistic youth. An exploration of Black autistic youth's voices can shed light on whether and how they experience educational disparities. Little is known about how autistic students navigate and experience the learning environment because first-person perspectives from autistic children are exceedingly uncommon (Kirby et al., 2015). This study explored the educational experiences of Black autistic youth and sought to establish potential approaches to reducing inequities in outcomes for Black autistic youth by gathering the perspectives of these youth.

## **State of Research**

### ***Autism Prevalence***

Historically, autism was diagnosed at higher rates in White children; however, more recently, the difference between the rates in Black and White youth has diminished (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023). Currently, the prevalence of autism is estimated as 1 in 36 children, with boys four times more likely to be diagnosed than girls, and the condition affects individuals across all racial and economic strata (Maenner et al., 2023). The often-

repeated mantra, attributed to Dr Stephen Shore, that “if you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism,” encapsulates the complex characteristics, behaviors, and communication differences among individuals with autism (Autismspeaks.org, n.d.). Differences in or difficulties with communication, challenges with receptive and expressive speech, difficulties in navigating social situations, repetitive interests and behaviors, and sensory sensitivities are some of the characteristics of autistic individuals. However, each autistic individual experiences autism uniquely (CDC, 2023). Despite the pervasiveness of autism diagnoses, autism research remains largely homogenous (Jones et al., 2020). Furthermore, the perspectives, experiences, and voices of autistic youth have been sparsely represented in the academic literature (Goodall, 2020; E. I. Williams et al., 2019). The studies that do include representations of these largely consist of “verbally/cognitively able male pupils” (E. I. Williams et al., 2019, p. 24) who are White. There is, therefore, a need to address underrepresentation in autism literature and research (Jones & Mandell, 2020; Maye et al., 2021; Shaia et al., 2020).

### ***Autism and Race***

Historically, Black families have not been represented in autism research (Shaia et al., 2020), including genetic autism research (Hilton et al., 2010). As Davis et al. (2022) noted, “Autism research that focuses specifically on the African American population is largely non-existent” (p. 3). Instead, most autism research has focused on White and male individuals (Bennett & Goodall, 2022; Diemer et al., 2022; Happé & Frith, 2020). There is a need for representative autism research. Additionally, intervention research, or evidence-based autism research, which is thought to be effective in all autism populations, has often not included ethnically and racially diverse participants (Steinbrenner et al., 2022; West et al., 2016), a factor that is arguably essential to determine whether interventions are evidence-based (see Smith et al.,

2020). Applied behavior analysis (ABA), a common and controversial intervention, falls into this category. However, as Čolić et al. (2022) asserted, despite its popularity, there is a need for “culturally responsive and context-specific applied behavioral (ABA) practice” (p. 1033), as well as providers that practice cultural humility and engage in ABA practices that are adapted for cultural relevance. In other words, it is essential for providers to acknowledge Black families’ historical racial experiences of medical institutions and providers that may hinder the delivery of quality care and to engage in behaviors that respect “the lived experiences of people of color” (Čolić et al., 2022, p. 1033). This call for “cultural-specific strategies” (Wilder et al., 2004, p. 105) to support diverse autistic youth is not new. Researchers have argued that “autism research has a race problem” (Jones et al., 2020), and the lack of Black autistic participants in autism research evidences this problem (Broder-Fingert et al., 2020). There is, therefore, a need for “culturally competent research” (Maye et al., 2021, p. 4209) designed to address the needs of Black families with autistic children.

### **The Ignorance of Race and Ethnicity in Autism Research**

Not only are Black autistic youth not represented in autism research, but a significant proportion of autism research in general has also ignored race as a factor (Pierce et al., 2014; Steinbrenner et al., 2022). This lack of inclusive research is not exclusive to Black people with autism, and it includes other racial, ethnic, and other underrepresented groups (Bennett & Goodall, 2022). For example, previous reviews noted that race and ethnicity continue to be inconsistently reported in autism research (Brede et al., 2017; Goodall, 2020; Lebenhagen, 2022) despite recommendations that it do so (Pierce et al., 2014; Steinbrenner et al., 2022). In a recent scoping review, Harris et al. (2020) found that the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic populations continues to be a problem in autism research. Importantly, the lack of autism

research involving ethnic minorities is not exclusive to the United States (Bennett & Goodall, 2022). In one large systematic review of evidence-based practices, which included over 1,000 articles spanning 28 years (from 1990 to 2017), Steinbrenner et al. (2022) found that only 25% of the studies included details of participants' race or ethnicity. There is a need for autism researchers to be inclusive of diverse populations and participants, thereby increasing the likelihood of gaining insights into diverse perspectives and meeting the needs of these populations (Steinbrenner et al., 2022).

### ***White Disability***

The current understanding of disability and autism is heavily informed by White perspectives. For example, Stapleton and James (2020) posited that “White scholars often research about and with a mostly White disabled student population,” which has led to “an essentialized White understanding of disability” (p. 217). There is, therefore, a need to understand disability outside of this paradigm. Moreover, while there is a lack of research regarding Black autistic youth, there is a lack of research on Black autistic adults. Researchers have suggested that the lack of research on Black autistic adults is a result of scholarly neglect by autism researchers (Malone et al., 2022). Lovelace et al. (2021) suggested that over a 7-decade period, only three studies centered on the experiences of Black autistic women and girls. Autistic adults are at risk of troubling outcomes in life, such as early mortality (Kuo et al., 2018). These facts highlight the need for research concerning the experiences of autistic individuals across their life spans, especially for Black autistic individuals. One way to increase this research is to focus on their experiences as children and adolescents while conducting longitudinal studies that can inform systems of support, programming, and interventions (Robison, 2019).

## **Educational Experiences of Black Autistic Youth**

There is a need to not only diversify autism research (Bennett & Goodall, 2022; Jones & Mandell, 2020; Lovelace et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2014; Shaia et al., 2020) but also engage with the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of autistic youth (Carroll & Twomey, 2021; Ellis, 2017; Parsons et al., 2021) because the voices of Black autistic youth are virtually nonexistent in the literature. Little is known about the attitudes, successes, challenges, and everyday experiences of these youth.

Given the lack of research on Black autistic youth, it is important to situate these youth in the context of Black youth in general. Historically, Black youth with and without disabilities have experienced disproportionately negative educational outcomes (Carter et al., 2017; Gage et al., 2019; Reid & Knight, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2020). Historically, “Race and disability have been intertwined and linked” (Artiles, 2013, p. 330) in education. Artiles (2013) asserted that this commingling has resulted in the racialization of disability. As discussed in studies by Huang (2018) and Yull and Wilson (2018), racial disparities in school discipline are well documented in the literature, and disciplinary policies have contributed to bleak outcomes for disabled students of color (Abudu & Miles, 2017). The factors that contribute to these differences are complex and intersectional (Henry et al., 2020), but they have persisted. Parental educational level, family socioeconomic status (Henry et al., 2020), differences in teacher expectations (Gershenson et al., 2016), systemic racism (Marchand et al., 2019), unintentional racism and unconscious bias (Moule, 2009), and biased and/or unprepared school personnel (Morgan, 2021) are some of the variables that contribute to these differences.

It has been argued that almost every study on school suspensions affirms the disproportionate rates of suspension of Black students versus their White counterparts (Huang,

2018; J. P. Wright et al., 2014). In their meta-analysis, Young et al. (2018) noted that research over the previous 30 years found disparities in the disciplinary practices used with Black students. The evidence is clear: Black students, in general, are vulnerable to negative educational outcomes, and Black students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable (Carter et al., 2017; Payne-Tsoupros & Johnson, 2022; Reid & Knight, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2020). Stated differently, Black students are at risk of a range of negative educational experiences, which may be compounded when these youth are disabled. Furthermore, autistic Black youth, given the characteristics of autism, are perhaps the most vulnerable Black disabled group. It is especially critical to understand the educational experiences of Black autistic youth given their level of vulnerability.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to (a) explore the educational experiences of Black autistic youth and (b) privilege their perspectives and “voices,” thereby providing first-person insights into the educational experiences of Black autistic youth that are absent from the research. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?
2. What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I utilized a critical perspective to investigate the educational experiences of Black autistic students. Employing a dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit) theoretical framework (Annamma et al., 2013), I interrogated the ways in which race and disability intersect in the context of autistic students’ experiences. Steinbrenner et al. (2022)

asserted that “it is important to consider intersectionality of race with dis/ability within autism research” (p. 2). To this end, DisCrit is a framework specifically designed to explore the axis of intersecting identities and is useful in interrogating how race, gender, and disability coalesce and contribute to the educational experiences of multiply marginalized students (Annamma et al., 2013).

The DisCrit approach is helpful in considering the impact of disability and race on the experiences of those who are disabled and minoritized. Black autistic youth inhabit two minoritized categories, and little is known about how they experience ableism and racism (Annamma et al., 2013). Notably, “DisCrit rejects any attempt to offer an account of the life and experience of all people with dis/abilities without their voices” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 21). For these reasons, soliciting the first-person perspectives of autistic youth is essential for understanding their personal experiences from their perspectives, as opposed to an understanding gained through the filters of adults.

In addition to DisCrit, the social model of disability posits that disabled individuals have the right to “redefine disability” (Oliver, 1990, p. 11) and, consequently, themselves. This lens considers the social construction of disability and the role society plays in labeling the disabled. Importantly, the social model contends that disability is socially situated and external to the individual. This paradigm is in diametrical opposition to the medical model of disability, which pathologizes disability within the individual (Oliver, 1983, 1990). Within the conceptualization of the DisCrit framework and through the lens of the social model of disability, this study used case study methods to investigate the everyday lived experiences of Black autistic youth through their first-person perspectives.

### ***Identity-First and Person-First Language***

The social model of disability is a tool empowering disabled individuals to push back against the medical model of disability in multiple ways. One key aspect of the social model of disability is that it rejects the medical model's authority to name disabled individuals. Therefore, autistic identity is not something that has happened to an individual; rather, it is crucial to the essence of an individual's lived experiences. Some autistic individuals take pride in the "autistic" moniker and use autism as their primary identity, while others do not. To this end, there are ongoing and contentious debates within the autism community of stakeholders regarding people-first (person with autism) or identity-first (autistic person) language (Botha et al., 2021; Taboas et al., 2023; Vivanti, 2020). I enter this debate equally comfortable with either approach, yet I defer to the preferences of the individual, recognizing that there is no uniform agreement on either approach to autism identity. In a recent survey, Taboas et al. (2023) reported that 87% of autistic adults preferred identity-first language, while 13% preferred people-first language. However, although Taboas et al. collected demographic information, since they did not report the survey findings by race, the terminological preferences of their Black survey respondents are not known. While I acknowledge the purported preference of autistic adults for identity-first language, I make room for people-first language with respect to the 13% of respondents who prefer people-first language, as well as considering the lack of knowledge regarding the language preferences of Black autistics. Furthermore, these are the results from only one survey. Researchers have acknowledged the need for studies on diverse populations to establish their language preferences (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021). It is not known whether the identity-first preference is a White preference or a collective preference, inclusive of the desires of Black

people with autism. To this end, throughout this study, I use people-first and identity-first language interchangeably.

In this study, I use the term “Black” to designate U.S.-born African Americans who possess a unique racial, social, cultural, and historical experience within the context of the United States of America. The terms “Black” and “African American” are used interchangeably throughout.

### **Definitions**

In this section, I define several terms used within this project for clarity. Many of the terms are explored in greater depth within the project.

**Asset-Based:** Refers to identifying and referencing positive characteristics, abilities, or traits associated with an individual.

**Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASCs):** Also known as autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in the *DSM-IV*. Rejecting the medical model and, consequently, the negative connotations associated with “disorder,” I refer to ASCs and autism in this project. ASCs are characterized by differences in social skills, communication difficulties, and repetitive thoughts or behaviors, sometimes including fixations on topics. Autistic individuals may have differences in verbal and communication skills, which range from highly verbal to nonverbal. ASCs are lifelong experiences.

**Deficit-Based:** Refers to the ways in which negative characteristics are often associated with children with disabilities or intellectual differences, as opposed to focusing on the positive or asset-based characteristics of students.

**Disability Hierarchy:** Refers to the overarching social structure amongst peers based on the severity or presentation of disability characteristics, in which individuals with less pronounced disabilities sit at the top of the social structure.

**Educational Equity:** While there are competing definitions, I define it as the accumulated and accrued tangible value associated with an individual's PreK-12 educational experience.

**Neurodiversity:** The recognition or belief that humans' intelligence, personalities, and ways of being are inherently diverse.

**Neurotypical or Typical:** Often used to describe individuals not diagnosed with ASC, these terms are used to signify regular, socially normal, or simply nonautistic.

**The Significant Other:** A historical term used to describe "social agents" who are more than a mentor and have caring and impactful roles and influence in the lives of youth (Cheng & Starks, 2002). Significant others influence student beliefs, attitudes, and expectations.

### **Significance of the Study**

Overall, this study offers insights into first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth regarding their educational experiences, as well as insights from parents and educators.

Furthermore, this study offers insights into effective methods for soliciting the perspectives and voices of autistic youth. The goals of this study were as follows: (a) to contribute Black autistic youth perspectives to the literature on autism; (b) to provide insights into parents' and service providers' perspectives regarding Black autistic youth educational experiences; and (c) to explore how Black autistic youth educational experiences are informed by the historical educational experiences of Black youth in general. Importantly, this study provides insights into the specific successes and challenges three Black autistic youth experienced through privileging their voices.

## **Conclusion**

There is a lack of literature with a specific focus on the experiences of Black autistic youth. Given the characteristics of autism and the historical educational inequities faced by Black youth in general, research is needed to parse out the experiences of Black autistic youth so that administrators, educators, and policymakers can apply asset-based support systems, interventions, and expectations that enable academic success and educational equity for these students.

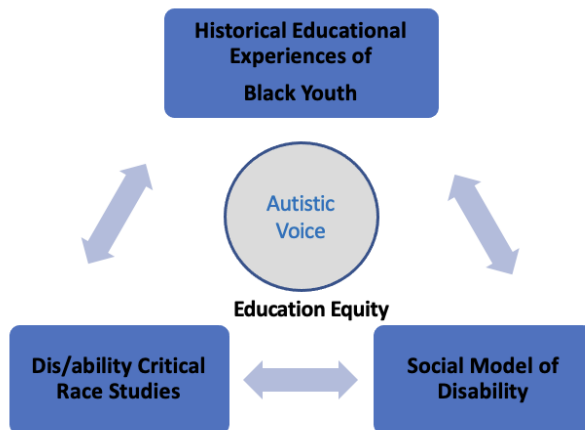
## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with an introduction of the conceptual framework, which includes an overview of DisCrit and the social model of disability and shows why these frames are appropriate for this study. This chapter includes a review of the literature about Black youth educational experiences and the lack of research examining Black autistic youth perspectives. Importantly, this chapter includes an overview of the literature related to the methods previously utilized to elicit autistic youth perspectives and voices, which reflects how the research questions (RQs) that guide this study were developed.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model for this study (see Figure 1) was developed and undergirded by the historical and ongoing nature of the disparate educational outcomes for Black youth (Gage et al., 2019; Young et al., 2018). I contend that the experiences of Black autistic youth cannot be understood outside of the historical context of the experiences of Black youth in general.

Figure 1  
*Conceptual Framework*



In conjunction with the historical educational experiences of Black youth, I built upon dis/ability critical race studies and the social model of disability while foregrounding autistic youth voices and educational equity. Therefore, the interplay between the DisCrit theoretical framework, which considers the interwoven and complex ways in which race and disability interact (Annamma et al., 2013), coupled with the social model of disability (Oliver, 1983), was informed by the historical educational experiences of Black youth, as this study considered the educational experiences of Black autistic youth. The DisCrit framework aligned closely with the social model of disability, which rejects socially constructed deficit-based characterizations of disability in favor of asset-oriented self-identification (Oliver, 1983). I foreground the notion of the autistic voice because little research that privileges Black autistic youth voices has been published at the time of writing. Educational equity must include the perspectives of autistic youth because for Black autistic youth to access equitable educational experiences, their interests must be represented in the research literature. The literature signals not only a lack of representation in autism research (Bennett & Goodall, 2022) but also the complete omission of Black autistic voices.

Within this conceptual framework, the historical racial context of autism research took primacy over the contemporary conception that there are no differences in autism-prevalence rates between Black and White children (CDC, 2023). While the CDC (2023) acknowledged that Black children are often diagnosed with autism at older ages than their White peers, it is critical that researchers understand that racial disparities continue to affect Black families. In other words, while, on paper, rates of autism appear to have equalized, it is still necessary to undertake significant research before it can be asserted that race is no longer an issue in autism research and that autism research is inclusive (Shaia et al., 2020). Furthermore, as noted by Broder-

Fingert et al. (2020) and Pearson et al. (2022), Black families continue to face distinctive challenges in accessing autism services. Constantino et al. (2020) reported a 3-year delay in autism diagnoses for Black families from the point at which a caregiver registers an initial concern. Researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders must understand that, despite improvements in autism diagnosis rates, unique and pervasive challenges remain for Black families with autistic youth (Maye et al., 2021).

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Currently, contentious discourse often prevents in-depth discussions about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Despite the political and cultural challenges in discussing these issues, it was essential for this study to explore educational equity in the context of historical educational outcomes. For example, Black children experience greater rates of school suspensions (Bell, 2020; Rosenbaum, 2020), lower rates of school graduation (Yull & Wilson, 2018), and lower levels of school achievement (Paschall et al., 2018) than their White counterparts. Sullivan et al. (2014) found that Black students may be 3.6 times more likely to be suspended. This was further evidenced by Gopalan (2019), who investigated the negative relationship between the discipline gap and the achievement gap and further conceptualized by Gansen (2021), who argued that these disciplinary differences, beginning as early as preschool, directly contribute to the reproduction of inequality. The academic literature, therefore, firmly demonstrates inequitable educational outcomes for Black youth.

There is no single authoritative definition of the term “educational equity,” as it carries different connotations for different people (Kaffle, 2021). Some definitions of equity focus on pursuing equal access, and others focus on delivering equal outcomes (Artiles, 2011; Chu, 2019; Jordan, 2010; Kaffle, 2021). However, regardless of whether equity is conceived in terms of

opportunity or outcomes, I argue that the pursuit of educational equity must focus on eliminating negative racialized experiences for students. The 2015 Every Student Succeed Act required state-level policies that target reductions in educational inequities (Chu, 2019). The result was the formulation of 52 different policies (including those from the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico), which lacked a consensus on the operational definition of equity. The majority of the planned definitions focused on equitable access, and fewer than half focused on equitable outcomes (Chu, 2019). Moreover, each state developed its own measures to ascertain equity. This resulted in what Voulgarides (2022) called a “crazy quilt of state policies” (p. 17).

Educators have generated confusing and competing definitions of educational equity, which hampers the quest to improve student outcomes. Nationally, a patchwork of policies targeting educational inequities has been developed, and educational disparities persist. Jordan (2010) noted that “equity is a complex social phenomenon and equalizing opportunities, and equalizing outcomes are vastly different enterprises” (p. 147). Historically, Black students and other students of color have not experienced equitable opportunities or outcomes. For example, the overrepresentation of Black and brown students in special education has been a problem for over 50 years (Dunn, 1968).

Across the United States, most state-specific educational-equity discourses focus on equitable educational access and/or outcomes in various forms (Chu, 2019). However, I was interested in expanding these contemporary equity discourses. I proposed to unsettle traditional notions of educational equity by evoking Ladson-Billings’ conception (2006) of education debt. I was not the first to expand the discussion around this topic. For example, Thorius and Tan (2016) engaged in a historical-debt analysis, pointing out the harm associated with excluding children with disabilities from inclusive classrooms and how the debt of these children, in particular, “has

continued to accrue” (p. 93). Others have utilized financial nomenclature, such as funds of knowledge and social and cultural capital, to highlight the types of value inherent in marginalized communities (see Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). In their analysis, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) discussed funds of knowledge in the context of social and cultural capital and converting these funds into forms of capital whose tangible or contextual value effects change. For example, the authors noted that “the mere recognition of funds of knowledge has not translated into better educational and labor outcomes for under-represented students” (p. 178). In other words, these conceptions of funds and capital often amount to moral victories but not tangible progress. I was interested in moving beyond such moral victories and into exploring tangible financial considerations of educational equity.

Numerous asset- and strength-based approaches that affirm and build on student talents and interests have also been developed (White, 2022). Legitimate economic costs are associated with educational inequities. As noted by Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011), previous efforts did not necessarily result in “better educational and labor outcomes” (p. 178), or what I call value, which can be defined as improvements in equity. In financial discourses, equity is thought of as a stock share of the accumulation of an asset, such as the accumulated value of a home. I believe there is value in defining educational equity in financial terms.

Traditional notions of equity in terms of outcome or opportunity do little to position educational equity as a tangible asset. I assert that educational equity can be considered as the recognition of the worth of an individual’s educational attainment and the accumulation of value associated with this. In this regard, I did not wish to reproduce human capital theory, which suggests that people are a means and measure of production, valued for their economic contribution to a market economy, or, as Chiappero-Martinetti and Sabadash (2014) noted, “A

certain stock of knowledge, skills and abilities can be associated with a precise economic value” (p. 211). Although human capital theory dominates educational-policy discourse (Walker, 2012), numerous scholars have discussed its “social bankruptcy” (Baptiste, 2001, p. 198). A major limitation of human capital theory is its implication that social disparities and inequalities are simply “inevitable outcomes of a competitive free market” (Baptiste, 2001, p. 195). However, it is important to acknowledge the capability models that have developed through the analysis of the shortcomings of human capital theory (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2014.; Walker, 2012). I suggest that educational equity is the accumulated worth, knowledge, skill, and capability amassed through an individual’s schooling experience (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2014). This definition positions educational equity as an asset class or capital and capability. I foreground this definition within my conceptual framework (see Figure 1), in which autistic youth voices are also central. As Walker (2012) notes, these education-enabled “capabilities are the potential to achieve functionings,” or “actual freedoms people have to do and to be what they value being and doing” (p. 388). The credentials bestowed upon students when they emerge as graduates attest to the value, the accrued equity of their education. At this point, educational equity, in my proposed articulation, reflects the compounded value of education as an asset over the timeframe of an individual’s schooling. As in the equity in a home, educational equity should accrue in the manner of compounding interest.

However, many Black students with and without disabilities have been denied the opportunity to build educational equity. For example, for many students, disproportionate school discipline (Young et al., 2018), relatively lower expectations (Gershenson et al., 2016), segregated schooling (DeMatthews et al., 2021), and the banking model (Freire, 1970/2007) of education have deprived them of education with significant commercial value. Ladson-Billings

(2006) masterfully captured the discomfiture the education edifice necessarily imposes, given how public education has siphoned arguably most of the wealth from the public-school experience for so many. To develop the metaphor, education debt is the deficit in the educational equity of devalued classes of students with and without disabilities. Others have advanced notions of educational debt, eschewing the notion of educational bankruptcy (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011; Mazama, 2007). For example, Bass and Gerstl-Pepin (2011) thoroughly explored this notion in the specific context of school reform. They argued that “school reform must acknowledge the role that the historical, social, political, and moral debt play in low student achievement” (p. 913). The educational debt owed to Black and brown students with and without disabilities has not been serviced by society (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In order to improve educational outcomes for the most vulnerable of students, we must build tangible value into their education and educational experiences, which they can access and leverage after the completion of their studies.

Autistic youth voices build from educational equity. Engagement with youth about their educational experiences is important, as this demonstrates that these youth should have a say in their own lives. Furthermore, historical educational disparities ground the conceptual framework in this study and inform the DisCrit theoretical framework. The lens of the social model of disability accompanies DisCrit’s conceptualization of race and disability as social constructs that have a material influence on individuals, especially on the ways in which they are viewed by society (Annamma et al., 2013). Within this framework of historical educational disparities, using DisCrit and the social model of disability, this study highlighted the voices of Black autistic youth in the pursuit of educational equity.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***DisCrit***

In their foundational text, “Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the Intersections of Race and Dis/ability,” Annamma et al. (2013) combined elements from disability studies and critical race theory to propose the DisCrit framework, an intersectional theoretical approach concerned with interrogating race and ability. In the same way that critical race studies have not fully explored the implications of disability, disability studies have not fully explored race, and Annamma et al. (2013) melded the two theories together in an effort to mitigate these shortcomings. Importantly, DisCrit is a framework that rejects color-evasiveness and centers the interrogation of race (Stapleton & James, 2020). The DisCrit approach is composed of seven tenets, which are conceived as tools to question notions of race and ability. Because DisCrit is a framework specifically designed to explore the axis of intersecting identities, it is useful to critique the ways in which race, gender, and disability commingle and contribute to disparate school outcomes (Annamma et al., 2014). Pearson et al. (2020) stated that “when race and disability are combined, it is the axis of one oppression with another” (p. 305), and interrogating this axis and the ways race and disability conjoin and diverge is essential for exploring the lived experiences of Black autistic youth.

Black autistic youth exist in an intersection of competing oppressions of race and disability. An investigation of the experiences of Black autistic youth can shed light on how these forms of oppression influence educational experiences and outcomes for these youth. Race, disability, and gender may interact in obvious or subtle ways (Annamma et al., 2013). For example, race and disability may be at the forefront of a Black autistic individual’s identity, or they may be unconscious, suppressed, or unimportant. A Black youth’s experience of autism

may supersede their experience of race. Alternatively, a Black youth's experience of racial bias may supersede their experience of disability. However, there are indications that since some parents do not speak openly with their children about their autism diagnosis, some youth may not be aware that they are autistic (Riccio et al., 2021). Further, as can be surmised from a DisCrit perspective, Black autistic youth experiences may be influenced by a vacillating and competing space in which race and disability interact dialectically with educational opportunities (Annamma et al., 2013). To explore these experiences, I employed three DisCrit tenets, discussed below.

### ***DisCrit Tenets***

I employed DisCrit Tenets 2, 3, and 4 to explore the experiences of Black autistic youth. The second tenet of DisCrit questions “singular notions of identity such as race *or* dis/ability” and “values multidimensional identities” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). Black autistic youth hold multiple identities. They are youth but may not have the privilege of being perceived as such, as evidenced by the adultification of Black girls and boys, in which they are viewed as older and less innocent than their peers (Epstein et al., 2017; Hines et al., 2021). They are Black, which may lead them to be stereotyped, and they are autistic, which may impose on them the assumption of intellectual or emotional deficit. Black autistic youth occupy multiple identity positions, and Tenet 2 is a tool to explore how these identities influence their lived experiences.

The third tenet of DisCrit closely aligns with the social model of disability by focusing on the social construction of disability and race and the effect that conceptualizations and labels of race and disability can have on individuals (Annamma et al., 2013). This tenet is intriguing in the context of the social model of disability because deficit ideation and labeling, when conjoined with lowered expectations, can prevent a student from reaching their full potential. Autism must

be understood in the context of the social construction of disability, especially given its social characterizations and characteristics. In this context, the social model of disability is important to consider when discussing the experience of autistic children. Furthermore, “DisCrit exposes the fault lines in the ableist and deficit-oriented perspectives of disability—naming the social construction of disability to illustrate the multiple dimensions of disability and disability’s interconnections with race and other socially constructed identities” (Migliarini & Annamma, 2020, p. 8). The social construction of disability within the context of the medical model can function to assign disability and consequent assumptions of impairment guided by ableist belief systems. The social model of disability unsettles these assumptions. Additionally, Tenet 3 points to the power inherent in labeling and labels. The terms “Black” and “autistic” may further problematize youth, given the negative associations with both. Labeling can have tangible consequences, and eliciting the perspectives of Black autistic youth may help to better understand their experiences.

Perhaps the most pertinent tenet in this research, Tenet 4 “privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). It is important to privilege the voices of autistic students (Banks et al., 2022). Exploring how these young people feel about themselves and how they experience race and autism could shed light on how best to support them.

The DisCrit approach is useful in moving beyond historical conceptualizations of deficit-based educational precepts. For example, the *achievement gap* and *overrepresentation* in special-education categories are fertile zones of academic inquiry supported by decades of research (Dunn, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, the literature on the achievement gap and overrepresentation often focuses on negative educational outcomes for Black youth without

highlighting the historicity of these disparate outcomes. The focus on the longstanding achievement gap obscures the other ways in which students of color are disenfranchised in the educational space (Annamma et al., 2014). Furthermore, as Annamma et al. (2014) argued, overrepresentation research often focuses on “uni-dimensional categories” (p. 60), which can obscure the pernicious ways in which overrepresentation in special education can make students vulnerable to overrepresentation in other categories later.

The DisCrit approach offers an asset-based framework that foregrounds the first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth. Moreover, the DisCrit framework complicates easy generalizations and involves complex and, often, competing variables, requiring the deliberate and nuanced interrogation of experiences. The DisCrit approach considers race and disability in light of the negative historical and substantive realities associated not only with the achievement gap and a variety of negative overrepresentations but also with the pernicious school-to-prison pipeline (Abudu & Miles, 2017). The theory of the school-to-prison pipeline posits that inflexible and punitive school policies and practices have had the pernicious consequence of introducing school-age children to the legal system at increasingly young ages as a result of behaviors that were once handled within the purview of educational spaces. This has had exceedingly disproportionate negative educational outcomes for Black and Brown youth (Wald & Losen, 2003). Zero-tolerance school policies and the increased presence of police officers in schools, often billed as safety or resource officers, have resulted in what Mallett (2016) called an exponential increase in referrals to the legal system, as well as student arrests.

### ***The Social Model of Disability***

The social model of disability, first proposed almost 4 decades ago by Oliver (1983), specifically challenged what he called the individual model of disability, which, he noted,

pathologized disabilities through a medical lens. Two models, the social model and the medical model of disability, have dominated the disability-rights debate for decades (Anderson-Chavarria, 2021; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). The social model was both fodder and transport for an emancipatory reframing and redefinition of disability (Gallagher et al., 2014). The social model of disability was the lens that disability activists used to fight against societal disadvantages (Artiles, 2013). The medical model has been particularly influential as the dominant model in research on autism and special education (Connor et al., 2019; Reid & Knight, 2006), and this model continues to significantly influence how autism is viewed (Burch & Sutherland, 2006). The medical model does not consider historical, racial, or social contexts (Reid & Knight, 2006). Under the purview of the medical model, the adjudication of inequitable outcomes occurs through the independent remediation of individual challenges attributable to disabled individuals (Goering, 2015). On the other hand, according to the social model of disability, disability is socially located, external to the individual (Oliver, 1983, 1990), and exacerbated by “societal barriers” (Hogan, 2019, p. 257). According to the social model, the aforementioned historical racial and educational disparities must be considered in this larger social context.

In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability developed into a political tool for the advocacy of disability rights (Lang, 2007; Terzi, 2004). Fundamentally, the social model proposes a rejection not only of the perceived tragedy of disability but also of the power that medical and other professionals hold over the disabled in the form of naming, classification, assignation, and definition (Oliver, 1983). One tenet of the social model of disability is that the experiences of individuals with disabilities are privileged over the expertise of physicians, scientists, and other professionals (Gallagher et al., 2014; Oliver, 1990). In this view, the

experiences of Black autistic individuals should supersede the experiences and assertions of clinicians, researchers, and other professionals. In addition, they should be given primacy over the perspectives of parents and caregivers, which have often dominated the literature pertaining to Black autistic youth (e.g., Dababnah et al., 2018; Hannon et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2022; Lovelace et al., 2018; Pearson & Meadan, 2018). While these perspectives are essential, they should be used in conjunction with those of youth in order to gain insights into the latter's experiences (Preece & Jordan, 2009).

Another tenet of the model extols the importance of self-definition for disabled individuals by questioning the normalized power dynamics inherent in the medical model (Gallagher et al., 2014; Oliver, 1983). According to this tenet, people with disabilities have the right to name themselves in order to “redefine disability” (Oliver, 1990, p. 11). This includes deciding whether they prefer identity-first language or people-first language. Another tenet of the social model provides context for “disability” and situates disability outside the medical model by additionally bringing “attention to the cultural construction of disability” (Artiles, 2013, p. 335), such as representations of the disabled in television or social media. The social model was developed by upending commonly held beliefs about disability. It illustrates the ways in which societal norms can themselves be “disabling” (Goering, 2015, p. 137). Normative attitudes and beliefs about disability undermine the humanity of disabled people (Lang, 2007). By contrast, the model asserts that disabilities originate in society and are socially constructed (Gallagher et al., 2014; Goering, 2015; Oliver, 1983, 1990).

With the DisCrit framework in mind, I adopt the social model of disability. Notably, as Hogan (2019) pointed out, Oliver, the originator of the social model of disability, was not only a disability scholar but also a self-advocate, and “the primary early voices in disability self-

advocacy” were often “educated white men who had stable forms of disability” (p. 255). Stated differently, White disabled voices were often the least disempowered voices. Similarly, to the medical model, the social model also struggled to acknowledge the racial implications of disability (Hogan, 2019). Therefore, the utility of the social model is extended when coupled with DisCrit because the role of race is distinctly foregrounded in DisCrit.

The social model is a powerful lens for privileging the voices of Black autistic youth and considering their experiences in not only a social but also a cultural context. Gallagher et al. (2014) asserted that the social model had “emancipatory significance” for the disabled (p. 1120), a sentiment that Woods (2017) echoed when he called that model “a powerful tool for achieving emancipation for all disabled people” (p. 1094). As with the social model of disability, DisCrit recognizes that race and disability are “mutually constitutive social constructions with material realities” (Annamma & Handy, 2021, p. 42). Therefore, DisCrit and the social model of disability are powerful tools for understanding the realities of multiply marginalized Black and autistic youth and the ways in which social constructs of racism and ableism contribute to their educational experiences.

## **Review of the Literature**

In pursuit of specific academic literature that included and highlighted the perspectives, experiences, or voices of Black autistic youth, I conducted several literature searches. First, I conducted a literature search on the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) online database for peer-reviewed articles with the search terms “autism” or “ASD” or “autism spectrum disorder” and “Black” or “African American” and “Black American” and “voice” or “perspectives” or “views” and “experiences.” This search yielded 44 articles. Several of these articles focused on parental or familial experiences, with some focusing on fathers’ perspectives

and others on mothers' perspectives. However, none of the articles centered on the first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth.

I conducted an additional search on ProQuest Central, with the search criteria of "Black or African American or Black American" and "autistic student voice," "autistic youth voice," "autistic child voice," "autistic student experiences," "autistic youth experiences," and "autistic child experiences," which yielded one study (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2020). In an anonymous online survey designed to collect the perspectives of autistic youth on autism's impact on their high-school experiences, Bottema-Beutel et al. (2020) received 248 survey responses from high-school-age autistic youth or recent graduates, 59 (or 23.79%) of whom identified as Black or African American. However, the survey's results were dichotomized and reported as "White" or "non-White," with Black autistic responses commingled with those of other minoritized autistics. While there were no significant differences between the two groups in the study, two-thirds of the participants noted that autism had a negative impact on their high-school experience. Bottema-Beutel et al. (2020) did identify a small sample of studies specifically focused on "eliciting autistic students' perspectives on schooling" (p. 3397; i.e., Accardo et al., 2019; Bottema-Beutel et al., 2016; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Sciutto et al., 2012). However, Accardo et al. (2019) and Humphrey and Lewis (2008) did not report their findings by race or ethnicity. Bottema-Beutel et al. (2016) included demographic information, but they did not report their findings by race or ethnicity. Lastly, Sciutto et al. (2012) did not require their participants to identify race or ethnicity in their study. While these studies reflect an effort to elicit students' voices, there continues to be a lack of research that specifically elicits the voices of Black autistic youth regarding their educational experiences.

## Qualitative Case Study and Autistic Black Students

I searched ERIC using the key terms “autism,” “ASD,” “African American or Black students,” “qualitative,” “case study,” and “case studies.” While I did not limit the date range for these articles, I limited the search to peer-reviewed academic journals. This initial search yielded 15,770 results. I further refined the search to include the key terms “voice” or “perspectives” or “viewpoints.” This reduced the number of studies to 1,276. I then refined the search to include “inclusion,” and I limited the search to the abstracts, which produced 71 studies. I reviewed the abstracts of these studies to determine whether they were applicable. My inclusion criteria were straightforward. The studies needed to include autistic African American students, and they needed to be qualitative case studies. None of the 71 articles were case studies, and none focused on autistic Black children.

I decided to conduct a second ERIC search using the key phrase “autistic Black children case study,” resulting in two articles (Wolfberg & Schuler, 1993; Zilli et al., 2020). Wolfberg and Schuler’s (1993) ethnographic case study followed an autistic African American girl for 10 years. This study investigated a play-based intervention and its impact on reciprocal communication. Wolfberg and Schuler video-recorded peer-play-group sessions and analyzed the video. Unfortunately, they did not solicit input directly from the student. Zilli et al. (2019) published a European case study in which they solicited the voices of autistic students regarding their school experiences. Although this was a European study, an understanding of the experiences of Black autistic European students may have been insightful, if not informative. However, data on participant race were not included.

Next, I decided to perform a *where cited* search of the Wolfberg and Schuler (1993) article, which yielded a single applicable case study. Gourdine et al. (2011) utilized a case study

methodology to explore the experiences of a college-educated African American family with a son diagnosed with autism. However, this was a retrospective case study, and Gourdine et al. (2011) did not directly solicit feedback from the student about his experience. Notably, although the individual was nonverbal, other solicitation options could have been explored, such as photo elicitation, journaling, or written questions. Moreover, the family reported practitioner insensitivity and condensation during the testing and evaluation process. In addition, the family experienced difficulties in finding resources and support for their child. Gourdine et al.'s study highlighted the relational challenges that can arise between African Americans and support personnel, which can be attributable to cultural differences and practitioner insensitivity.

Finally, I conducted an additional search in PsychInfo using the search phrase “autistic African American children and case study,” which yielded seven studies. Out of these studies, only one fit my inclusion criteria (P. G. Williams et al., 1996). P. G. Williams et al.'s (1996) case study included two male children with ASD, one Black and one White, who had “clear primary interests in feminine gender-stereotyped activities and objects” (p. 636). The autistic Black child in the study was just under 4 years old and was reported as having a cross-gender preoccupation based solely on his interest in dressing in female clothes. This was a peculiar case study with significant problems, which I doubt would satisfy a contemporary Institutional Review Board (IRB) review cycle. For example, the study was premised upon problematizing a boy for playing dress-up in girls' clothing. It is developmentally normal for boys or girls to play dress-up in clothes that are traditionally worn by the opposite gender. While this was a case study, and it included an autistic African American child, first-person feedback from the child was not elicited. Therefore, this study was not applicable.

According to multiple literature searches, the case study methodology has not been used widely to study autistic African American children or to solicit the voices or perspectives of autistic African American students. I was successful in locating only three case studies (Gourdine et al., 2011; P. G. Williams et al., 1996; Wolfberg & Schuler, 1993) that included autistic Black children, and these studies had limited applicability to the study of the educational experiences and voices of Black autistic students. The case study has not been a widely used mode of inquiry in studies of the perspectives or voices of Black autistic children.

Due to the lack of case study research, there is a need to improve not only the quantity but also the quality of research that centers on the experiences of Black autistics. A first step in addressing this lack of research is for researchers to pursue insights into the perspectives of Black autistic youth. Given the paucity of academic research that explores the experiences of Black autistic youth, this review explored the adjacent research concerning the historically racialized educational experiences of Black youth in general.

### ***The Historically Racialized Educational Landscape***

Historically, African American children with and without disabilities have experienced disproportionately negative educational outcomes (Carter et al., 2017; Reid & Knight, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2020). The acknowledgment of this fact informed every aspect of this study. Some of these disproportionately negative educational outcomes include greater rates of school suspensions (Bell, 2020; Rosenbaum, 2020), overrepresentation in special-education disability categories (Reid & Knight, 2006; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002), lower rates of school graduation (Yull & Wilson, 2018), and lower rates of school achievement (Paschall et al., 2018). School suspensions are especially harmful to students' long-term academic prospects (Rosenbaum, 2020). Citing the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2018), Payne-Tsoupros and Johnson

(2022) stated that Black students with disabilities represented 36% of disabled students arrested or referred to police officers while only accounting for 19% of the total number of students with disabilities. These racial disparities in educational outcomes have persisted for decades (Gage et al., 2019; Milner, 2007). Researchers have argued that “racial disparities in discipline and achievement have been normalized and accepted as natural at the expense of multiply-marginalized Students of Color” (Migliarini & Annamma, 2020, p. 1). Additionally, researchers have argued that racial bias is a defining and persistent feature of the U.S. educational system that contributes to these disparities (Carter et al., 2017). However, the extent of the disparities experienced by Black autistic youth is not well known.

### ***Blackness as Disability***

Given this racialization of disability in education (Artiles, 2013), it has been argued that Blackness and Black student identity have been effectively treated as disabilities (Paul-Emile, 2018). In a legal analysis, Paul-Emile (2018) contended that the disabling impact of a Black racial designation is as pressing as an “actual disability” (p. 339). Paul-Emile was not the first to recognize the ways in which race and disability have been conjoined (Annamma et al., 2013). However, their assertion is intriguing in that it highlights the pernicious way in which race continues to negatively influence outcomes for students. Neither being a Black student nor having a diagnosis of autism ensures poor academic performance or behavioral challenges. It would seem that Black students with disabilities must navigate not only the disability of autism but also the disability prescribed by their Blackness, as suggested in Paul-Emile’s (2018) conception.

### *Expectations and Student Outcomes*

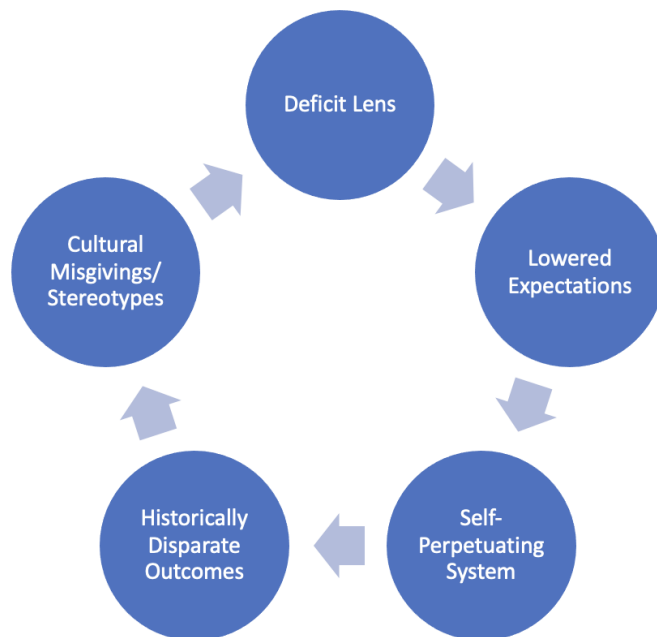
Stereotypes are often precursors to negative or lowered expectations, which further contribute to the predicament of so many Black youth. Teacher expectations can influence student achievement, as first evidenced in Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) classic study, "Pygmalion in the Classroom." Rosenthal and Jacobson found "rather strongly that children who are expected by their teachers to gain intellectually in fact do show greater intellectual gains after one year than do children of whom such gains are not expected" (p. 121). There is strong evidence domestically and internationally that teacher expectations can, in fact, contribute to students' attainment levels (de Boer et al., 2018; Gentrup et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is strong evidence that teachers hold lower expectations for students with learning disabilities and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Wang et al., 2018).

In their systematic review of teacher-expectation research covering a 30-year-period, Wang et al. (2018) found that most studies reflect "negative achievement stereotypes" and "lower teacher expectations" (p. 130), not only for Black students within the United States but also for Latino students domestically and other minoritized groups internationally. This suggests that Black students with disabilities and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to lower teacher expectations. Black students are often viewed from a deficit perspective, contributing to numerous negative educational outcomes (Love, 2019; Milner, 2007; Reid & Knight, 2006). These deficit perspectives, lowered expectations (Gilliam et al., 2016), and stereotypes (Wang et al., 2018) limit opportunities for Black youth, especially in educational spaces. Given this history, it is clear that Black youth are vulnerable, which further suggests that Black youth with disabilities, such as autism, are especially vulnerable in educational contexts (Abudu & Miles, 2017; Proffitt, 2022). There is a lack of academic research that investigates the

experiences of Black autistic youth, for which there is a need. In particular, I was concerned with the experiences of autistic youth, given the diversity of autism characteristics and presentations, which further predispose students to potentially precarious outcomes.

The literature has suggested a cyclical paradigm (see Figure 2) in which a deficit lens contributes to relatively lower teacher expectations for students (Love, 2019; Milner, 2007; Reid & Knight, 2006). These lowered expectations become precursors to a self-perpetuating process (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) that contributes to historically disparate outcomes. When teachers do not expect success from students, students may, in turn, not expect success from themselves. These outcomes contribute to cultural misgivings and stereotypes that further reinforce deficit-based views of students (Gilliam et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018). I believe that a significant opportunity appears at this juncture. Raising teachers' expectations of autistic youth can pay educational dividends. That is, the literature has suggested that when teachers have higher expectations of youth, students are likely to achieve greater academic success (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). As Cheng and Starks (2002) asserted, "Few factors shape academic outcomes more profoundly than do children's educational expectations" (p. 306). Autistic youth need high expectations from educators so that, in turn, they can adopt high expectations for themselves.

Figure 2  
*Historical Architecture of the Educational Experiences of Black Students*



Black youth are subjected to the judicial system by way of the educational system at increasingly alarming rates (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). This phenomenon is further complicated by the predicament of Black youth with disabilities. Instead of understanding and appropriate interventions and supports, these youth often receive the blunt force of punitive enforcements, such as suspensions, expulsions, and segregated education, in addition to poorer academic outcomes. Others have suggested that White supremacy and anti-Black racism permeates educational spaces and is the culprit for the multitude of historical and ongoing disparities in schools (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). It is crucial to consider what it means for Black children to be caught up amid a plethora of cultural misgivings, in which self-identification is secondary to the dominant deficit-based identity created for them, and in which schools, once thought to be places of uplift, are funnels into perpetual pipelines. Stated differently, Black boys and Black girls are not only historically vulnerable but contemporarily

problematized across educational contexts, to their detriment (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Payne-Tsoupros & Johnson, 2022; Wint et al., 2022).

### ***Research on Black Families with Autistic Youth***

The voices of Black autistic families are underrepresented in the literature (Harris et al., 2020; Shaia et al., 2020). However, while there is limited research concerning the experiences of Black families with autistic children, several contemporary scholars are conducting important work in this area (e.g., Dababnah et al., 2018; Hannon et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2022; Lovelace et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2022; Pearson & Meadan, 2018). Hannon et al. (2018), the father of an autistic child, examined the ways in which Black men approach the parenting of their autistic children; in one study, he examined the experiences of six Black fathers and used narrative to share their stories. Lovelace et al. (2018) investigated the experiences of three Black mothers raising autistic sons; they reported experiences of isolation and unawareness of autism in their community and families. Furthermore, these mothers reported the constant need to “fight for their sons on multiple fronts, including family, community, and school and service providers” (p. 13).

Pearson and Meadan (2018) and Dababnah et al. (2018) found that Black parents with autistic children report that healthcare providers may not be responsive to them when they raise concerns about their children. More recently, Pearson et al. (2022) published a study on faith and religious coping that centered on the voices of Black parents. A key finding in this study was that the Black parents experienced “double disenfranchisement” (p. 327)—that is, medical professionals and educators doubted them, and church parishes were not able to provide appropriate support for them and their children. Lewis et al. (2022) explored the coping mechanisms used by Black parents in raising autistic children and, like Pearson et al. (2022),

found that church involvement played an important role for these families. These studies all highlighted the importance of cultural responsiveness—that is, an awareness of the role that race plays in the context of supporting families with autistic children.

An increasing number of advocacy organizations and training programs that support Black families with autistic families have emerged. Fostering Advocacy, Communication, Empowerment and Support (FACES) is perhaps the first Black-parent-advocacy-training program, and it was specifically designed for Black families supporting autistic youth (Pearson, 2017; Pearson & Meadan, 2021). The Color of Autism ([www.thecolorofautism.org](http://www.thecolorofautism.org)), Autism in Black ([www.autisminblack.org](http://www.autisminblack.org)), and The Answer Inc. ([www.theanswerinc.org](http://www.theanswerinc.org)) are current advocacy organizations that facilitate training and other support mechanisms for Black families with autistic children.

Work that foregrounds the voices of Black autistic families is essential. However, work that is inclusive of the student voice often relies on the perspectives of parents or, teachers, or other adults and not on the perspectives and experiences of autistic children themselves. Students' voices are often overshadowed by parents, teachers, or other adults who are often asked to speak for them (DePape & Lindsay, 2016; Stafford, 2017). Researchers have explored “caregiver voices” (Stahmer et al., 2019, p. 754), “parents’ voices” (Boshoff et al., 2016, p. 784), “parent perceptions” (Rivera-Figueroa et al., 2022, p. 44), “parent and professional experiences” (Pearson et al., 2020, p. 305), and “teachers’ attitudes” (Gómez-Marí et al., 2022, p. 1) in the context of supporting autistic youth. However, to the best of my knowledge, no research that explores the first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth has been published.

Few studies have explored the voices, perspectives, perceptions, or attitudes of autistic youth (Fayette & Bond, 2018), and the studies that have done so often include international

research, such as the work of Simpson et al. (2022) and Goodall (2020). These works did not list demographic information, such as race or ethnicity, a problem that was previously noted in autism research in general (Pierce et al., 2014; Steinbrenner et al., 2022). While researchers are increasingly aware of the importance of highlighting autistic student voices in contemporary work, emphasizing the voices of ethnically and racially diverse participants has not been a priority.

### **Eliciting Autistic Youth Voices**

The voices of autistic children are often absent from the literature (Lebenhagen, 2022). Danker et al. (2019) suggested that one of the reasons for this is that researchers have difficulties in establishing the perspectives of these students. Ellis (2017) asserted that “the process of including autistic children in research is far from easy” (p. 24). However, the assertion that autistic students are difficult to include in research reinforces the medical model of disability, assigns responsibility to autistic children, and removes this responsibility from researchers (Parsons et al., 2021). To adopt the question posed by Parsons et al. (2021), “How do we listen to those children who ‘have no words’? and what do we learn from them when we do?” (p. 162). This predicament is not the fault of the child; rather, it is incumbent on researchers to design inquiries with this in mind pursuant to eliciting, hearing, and responding to the voices of autistic children in meaningful ways. This is why it is important to elicit the perspectives of Black autistic youth. Furthermore, as Ellis (2017) asserted, “It is important that all children have equal chances of participating in research, and the researcher is responsible for ensuring this” (p. 24).

While many researchers use the terms *student voice*, *perspective*, and *experience* interchangeably, it is important to expand on my definition of *voice*. Carroll and Twomey (2021) stated that “a definition of children’s voice places emphasis not only on hearing, but on attending

to children's feelings, needs, thoughts, wishes and preferences" (p. 710). Voice refers to understanding the perspectives and ascertaining the "feelings, needs, thoughts, wishes and preferences" (Carroll & Twomey, 2021, p. 710) of autistic youth. The feelings, needs, thoughts, wishes, and preferences of autistic youth are often not considered in the research process.

Parsons et al. (2021) noted that, ironically, while autistic youth are some of the most "scrutinized and assessed" individuals, "there is also very limited representation of their voices and experiences being explored, promoted, and valued directly in their own right" (p. 161). While autistic students' voices are lacking in the literature, other people's voices about autistic youth are not. These students experience extensive assessment, as Parsons et al. (2021) suggested, but this process occurs around the students and not necessarily with them. Rather than focusing on the student's point of view, the process is instead centered around how the student scores in various forms of assessment.

Preece (2002) was among the earliest to explicitly seek the perspectives of autistic children regarding their experiences. This study is recognized as one of the first to have involved autistic children by directly pursuing their opinions and perspectives (Beresford et al., 2004). Around the same time, Bauminger and Kasari (2000) utilized self-report questionnaires with "high functioning children with autism" (p. 447) to explore their conceptions of friendships and loneliness using quantitative methods. Preece (2002), however, was interested in a qualitative understanding of the impact of autism on researchers' abilities to "elicit children's opinions about their experience of short-term residential care" (p. 97). Preece noted difficulties during the data collection and suggested that "the characteristics of autism" were such that they were "limiting the validity and accuracy attributable to the results" (p. 101). Indeed, one critique of Preece's study is that it employed deficit-based language and ideas focused on the children's

limitations rather than their abilities. However, despite concluding that “consulting with such children is challenging and the process is fraught with difficulties,” Preece added, “Nevertheless, it remains imperative that strenuous and meaningful efforts to do so are made” (p. 103). To this end, Preece’s recommendations for improving the process included the use of visual support, establishing prior knowledge of the children, concreteness, and individualization, noting that “no single method was appropriate for all the children” (p. 102) regarding the data collection.

### ***First-Person Perspectives of Autistic Youth***

While a limited number of studies have attempted to obtain the first-person perspectives of autistic youth, more researchers are conducting this work and attempting to understand the methods that are most effective at soliciting their voices. Fayette and Bond (2018) conducted a systematic literature review that included 12 qualitative studies that met their inclusion criteria and elicited the views of autistic children about their educational experiences. All of the studies were international: two were conducted in Australia, one in Singapore, one in Belgium, and eight in the United Kingdom. The use of semi-structured interviews was the primary method of data collection in the studies, and several of the studies noted the importance of establishing rapport with participants (Fayette & Bond, 2018). One limitation of these studies is that they all included individuals “able to engage in verbal communication” (p. 359).

Fayette and Bond (2018) noted that many of the studies did not provide details about the individuals’ communication capacities or cognitive skills. Furthermore, the process for obtaining assent was often not included. A major critique of Fayette and Bond’s analysis is that the overall quality of the studies they used was “relatively weak” and not inclusive of participants representative of the heterogeneity of autism (i.e., the studies excluded those with limited or low verbal ability). Importantly, the participants’ race and ethnicity were not reported. Fayette and

Bond concluded that there was a “scarcity of qualitative research that elicited the views of young people with ASD about their educational experience” (p. 363). This scarcity is even more egregious considering the absence of research that explores the experiences of Black autistic youth.

Researchers have conducted large-scale reviews of the literature related to eliciting the voices of children with disabilities. For example, Tesfaye et al. (2019) conducted a synthesis that included 284 studies to investigate the interview methods that were used to ascertain first-person feedback from children with disabilities, with the assumption that these methods would be applicable for autistic youth. The purpose of their study was to identify the methods that were potentially the most efficacious in gathering the perspectives of autistic youth. Tesfaye et al. (2019) found that interviews, narratives, art, group discussions, diaries, and surveys were the most common methods used with children with disabilities. Within these options, participants were not limited to verbal language since they were able to respond with written language, sign language, images, and even gesturing. These approaches were effective in gaining first-person perspectives of individuals with disabilities, and they are viable options for gaining the first-person perspectives of autistic individuals.

Tesfaye et al. (2019) recommended that researchers consult parents before designing a research protocol and gaining insights into communication styles, preferences, strengths, and limitations of youth. Importantly, Tesfaye et al. stated that “throughout the process, from the selection of methodology to the elicitation of their perspective, it is crucial that researchers always assume the capabilities of youth with ASD” (p. 1892)—that is, researchers should assume competence and ability, and value their perspectives. If researchers assume limited capabilities in autistic youth, this may limit their ability to conceive of research that specifically

elicits and privileges these voices. However, as with Fayette and Bond (2018), Tesfaye et al. found that the perspectives of people with speech and communication challenges continued to be the least frequently captured in the research. Furthermore, Tesfaye et al. did not report participants' race or ethnicity, as these data were not reported in the studies they included in their analysis. Tesfaye et al. noted a sharp increase in articles "capturing the voices of youth with ASD and other disabilities" since 2017; however, they urged scholars to include more detailed descriptions of participants in general regarding their "diagnosis and communication abilities" (p. 1892). While there appears to be an increase in research eliciting autistic student voices, Black autistic students remain invisible as research participants.

It is clear that there is a lack of research that examines Black autistic youth experiences. In response to the lack of diversity in autism research, Steinbrenner et al. (2022) noted, "We need to critically examine all aspects of our research and address the implicit and explicit racism that is ubiquitous in our research and likely impacts our inclusion of participants of color" (p. 12). We may begin to fill the research void regarding the experiences of Black autistic youth by interviewing these youth directly in order to gain insights from their perspectives. Black autistic children are best positioned to comment on their own educational experiences. However, given the complexity of communication differences among those with autism, eliciting the perspectives of autistic children requires thorough planning and an approach that leverages best practices for working with children with disabilities, especially communication-based disabilities.

### ***Tools for Eliciting Autistic Students' Voices***

Courchesne et al. (2022) developed and piloted the Autism Voices protocol, which was designed to elicit the perspectives of autistic adolescents across the autism spectrum. This approach was developed to include autistic children with limited verbal communication.

Consistent with the recommendations of Tesfaye et al. (2019), the Autism Voices protocol includes an interview and a survey with parents to gain insights into their children's preferred modes of communication, likes, dislikes, triggers, et cetera (Courchesne et al., 2022). Building on Tesfaye et al. (2019), Courchesne et al. designed their interview protocol to be as "inclusive as possible" by employing a plethora of response modalities, such as an "augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device, writing, drawing, texting, using emojis, choosing or pointing at pictures" (p. 1126) based on the students' preferred communication methods, according to the parental feedback provided to the interviewers. The research methods for this project were based on the Autism Voices protocol manual, which was specifically adapted for this project.

A key feature of the Autism Voices protocol is flexibility, which amounts to tailoring each interview to the specific needs and preferences of the participant. This flexibility also includes skipping questions, probing when necessary, the freedom of the participants to move around and walk during the interview, and the availability of visual aids and pictorial supports (Courchesne et al., 2022). Consistent with the recommendation by Carroll and Twomey (2021), the Autism Voices protocol focuses on understanding the needs of autistic youth before, during, and after the research process, particularly during the interview process. This includes consistently ensuring informed consent and making participants aware that they can stop participating in the research at any time they wish. Furthermore, parents are invited to attend the interviews if they choose, with the goal of making the autistic youth comfortable while rapport is built with the interviewer. Courchesne et al. (2022) reported that autistic children "with various abilities are capable of voicing their perspectives," especially when the research community

“meets them where they are at” (p. 1134). In this regard, the Autism Voices protocol has been effective at eliciting the perspectives of autistic youth with various language abilities.

The literature regarding the first-person perspectives of students with disabilities such as autism has suggested the need for flexible interview protocols designed with individual participants’ communication preferences in mind based on feedback garnered from participants’ caregivers or parents (Carroll & Twomey, 2021; Courchesne et al., 2022; Ellis, 2017; Fayette & Bond, 2018; Tesfaye et al., 2019). The study of individuals with disabilities should not be about centering disability but about centering the individual (Cascio et al., 2021). This centering should include adaptation to the needs of research participants by researchers. However, when studying students with disabilities, researchers must be mindful of the impact and role of race, which is consistently absent in the literature on disability. Even when autism researchers focus on eliciting the voices of autistic children, race and ethnicity are often not considered.

In order to explore the first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth, it is important to understand the methods that have been most effective in obtaining the perspectives of autistic children. Previous autism research mostly privileged participants who were highly verbal (as noted in the reviews by Fayette and Bond (2018) and Tesfaye et al. (2019)). As Carroll and Twomey (2021) stated, “When voice is absent a different form of expression is required. A child’s ability to communicate, grow, develop and learn should not be confined to normative expectations” (p. 710). To this end, the study of first-person perspectives from autistic youth should not be limited to children who are verbal.

This literature review has shown that there is a need for autism researchers to continue to explore the experiences of Black families with autistic children and to start conducting research that explores the voices of Black autistic youth directly. It was the goal of this research to

investigate the experiences of autistic Black youth in order to gain insights from their perspectives. These insights are important in that they can be used to build strategies, policies, and practices that can be used to facilitate more equitable access and outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

In this review of the literature, I discussed the following: (a) my conceptual framework, (b) diversity, equity, and inclusion, along with an introduction of my conception of educational equity, (c) the social model of disability and its importance, (d) the literature related to case studies and Black autistic youth, (e) the historically racialized educational landscape, (f) contemporary research related to Black families with autistic youth, and (g) the literature related to the study of the voices and perspectives of autistic youth. The goal of this expansive review was to contextualize the current study by locating it within a historical context. In addition to revealing techniques for and challenges in obtaining the perspectives of autistic youth, this review indicated that there is no peer-reviewed autism research that elicits the perspectives or voices of Black autistic youth.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methods**

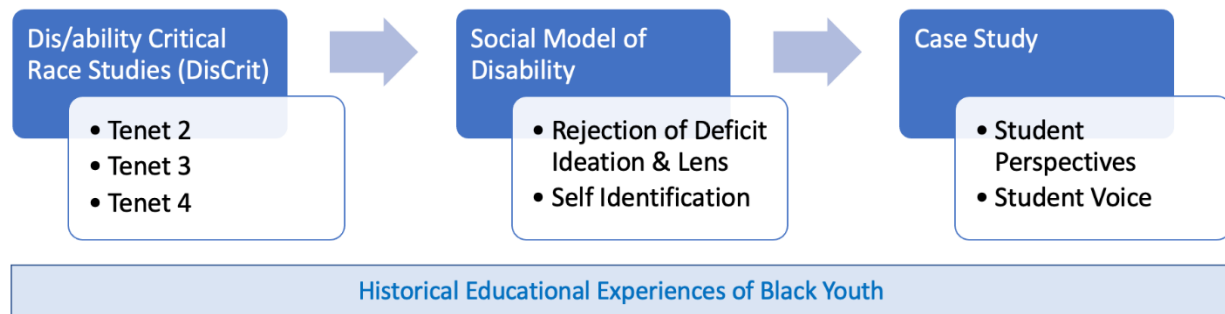
This chapter describes the methodology and research design that guided this study. It is important to understand the experiences of autistic individuals so that support, programming, and interventions can be designed to meet their diverse needs. The experiences and realities of autism are specific to individuals, and this diversity is the most prominent feature of autism (CDC, 2023). Therefore, this qualitative multiple-case study aimed to gain insights into the first-person perspectives of Black autistic youth regarding their educational experiences, which, historically, have been omitted from the literature. Black autistic youth comprise this study's case or bounded unit of interest. "Youth" are children between the ages of 12 and 18. Because Black autistic youth are not homogeneous, a multiple-case study design was utilized to capture their various experiences. The case study design is useful for understanding and interrogating the complexities of phenomena that are not easily captured with other methods. Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?
2. What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?

#### **Research Design**

To explore these RQs, I employed a multiple-case study design within the theoretical frame of DisCrit and the social model of disability (see Figure 3). This chapter provides a detailed outline of the steps utilized to collect and analyze data. The multiple-case study design, positionality, research procedures, recruitment, participants and sampling, setting, data collection, data analysis, quality indicators, case records, and ethical considerations are discussed.

Figure 3  
*Historical Educational Experiences of Black Youth*



### Multiple-Case Study

In this multiple-case study, the “cases” centered on three different Black autistic youth. Stake (1995) asserted that case studies focus on the “particularity and complexity” (p. xi) of phenomena. A case study is the identification and investigation of a bounded system with the goal of understanding the nuances and particulars of a specific situation and context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). There is a history of case study design use in autism research. Some of the earliest work that attempted to elicit autistic children’s perspectives utilized a case study design (Preece, 2002). One benefit of employing a multiple-case study approach, according to Yin (2018), is that multiple-case studies are more substantive than single-case studies since multiple-case studies are composed of several case studies, each of which is developed and analyzed individually. Another key feature of the multiple-case study design is cross-case analysis, in which individual cases are discussed in the context of the other cases (Yin, 2018). Because the available case study research related to Black autistic youth voices is thin, the multiple-case study design was an optimal approach to investigate the educational experiences of Black autistic youth.

Case study designs provide detailed, in-depth descriptions of the experiences of case objects or participants and are especially effective in showcasing human complexity, including

cultural insights. Thomas (2021) suggested that “a case study is about seeing something in its completeness, looking at it from many angles” (p. 24). Case studies require relationships, as Chirgwin (2015) noted, “to capture the richness of lived experiences” (p. 598). Therefore, my first goal was to establish rapport and relationships with each youth and parent involved in the study (Fayette & Bond, 2018). As Algozzine and Hancock (2017) contended, “Case study research methods allow researchers to capture multiple realities that are not easily quantifiable” (p. 78). The goal of this qualitative case study was to capture the complexity and richness of the multiple realities of Black autistic youth.

### **Positionality**

Qualitative methods begin with the premises that researchers are essential parts of their own research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leko et al., 2021) and that researchers are the instruments through which data are analyzed (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative research is personal (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995) because researchers bring their history and experience to their research (Gillborn et al., 2017; Leko et al., 2021). As Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, “All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study” (p. 21). My personal life influences my research interests, and, as Maxwell (2013) stated, “Separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (p. 45). Here, I make my values known, and I acknowledge that my role as the parent of an autistic youth influences how I analyze, interpret, and respond to the data. I am not objective in terms of being removed from the data; rather, I am reflective in terms of how I think about the data within the context of my own experiences. By acknowledging my personal perspectives and potential bias, I was able to review the data as both a father and a researcher, with the goal of objectively evaluating the data.

Importantly, in addition to my experience as a researcher, I am a first-generation college graduate, and my lived experiences as a Black male in America influence how I view the world, how the world views me, and how I view my research. Public deficit-based narratives about Black youth remain at the front of mind. During my formative years traversing middle and high school, Black youth like myself often carried the burden of names such as “statistic,” “endangered species,” “repeat offender,” and even “super predator.” These names were bookends to dominant narratives that stereotyped Black youth and contributed to collective societal belief patterns that did not support youth but, instead, reproduced cultural fears that were cemented in the form of tangible judicial policies (Curry, 2017). Black youth, particularly Black males, were to be feared, while Black women and girls often also fell victim to racist policies and practices. As the father of a multiracial autistic child, given my own educational journey, I am heavily concerned with ensuring my child and others like him have opportunities, high expectations from educators, and equitable experiences.

### **Research Procedures**

In this multiple-case study, I explored the educational experiences of three Black autistic youth by examining insights from the students’ own perspectives, as well as those of their parents and teachers. The study procedures (see Appendix A) are provided for future researchers interested in replicating this effort.

### **Recruitment, Participants, and Sampling**

After receiving IRB approval from the university, I distributed recruitment flyers via limited social media (i.e., Instagram; Twitter) and community contacts in autism support organizations. From June 2023 until August 2023, participants were recruited in North Carolina. The data were collected from June 2023 until September 2023. The families that expressed an

interest were screened to ensure their children met the study's inclusion criteria. Phone calls were held with parents who expressed an interest in the study, and they were provided background information on the project. Additionally, I confirmed that the youth met the inclusion criteria for the study during the Parental Phone Screen (see Appendix C). The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) identification of the child as Black or African American by the parent, (b) middle-school or high-school age of between 12 and 18, and (c) an autism diagnosis, confirmed by the mother. Autistic youth with diverse speech and language abilities were eligible for the study, including individuals who utilized augmentative or alternative communication devices. Individuals without an autism diagnosis were not eligible for the study. Given the intended target demographic and autism diagnosis requirement for this study, I utilized purposive sampling. The goal of purposive sampling, which is sometimes used interchangeably with purposeful sampling, is to take a "strategically purposeful" attitude to "information-rich cases to study (Patton, 2015, p. 265). " I intentionally focused on Black autistic youth with the purpose of gaining insights into their educational experiences. In total, five families expressed interest in the study, four of whom completed the phone screening to ensure they met the inclusion criteria and took the Pre-Interview Survey (see Appendix D). However, only three parents completed the required informed consent. This multiple-case study, therefore, centers on three Black autistic high-school students whose mothers expressed an interest in this study. The main point of contact for each case was the student's mother. The mothers are named in this study as Ms. Wilson, Ms. Jones, and Ms. Miller. Two of the youth identified as male, and one youth was female. The participants Lance Jones and Quan Miller were both 15, and Tasha Wilson was 14 at the time of the study (see Table 1). For this study, pseudonyms are used throughout.

Table 1  
*Youth Participants' Demographics*

Pseudonym	Diagnosis (Months)	Gender	Age (Years)	Grade	Support Need	Communication	Services	% of Time in Self-Contained Classroom
Tasha Wilson	36	F	14	ninth	High	Low verbal (one- and two-word responses, fragments)	Speech/OT	100
Lance Jones	36	M	15	10th	Low	Highly verbal (Talkative)	Speech/OT	50
Quan Miller	24	M	15	10th	High	Low verbal (one- and two- word responses, fragments)	Speech/OT	100

The parents were actively involved in each step of the interview and participated in every interview with their child. Table 1 presents details about each youth participant, including their communication style, the support services they received at the time at which the study was conducted, and the percentage of time each spent in a self-contained classroom. Additionally, the parents were asked to identify one or two teachers or service providers from their child's past that could provide insights about their child by completing a survey. In total, three students and three parents participated in this study, along with two teachers/service providers. The total number of participants, including the youth, mothers, and teachers, was eight. A teacher/service provider for Tasha Wilson completed a survey for the study, as did a teacher/service provider for Lance Jones. No teacher or service provider completed the Teacher/Service Provider Questionnaire (see Appendix L) for Quan. However, each interview was adapted based on family preferences and the youth's ability.

All three participants attended public schools in the southeast United States. Tasha and Quan spent 100% of their school day in a self-contained classroom. Lance spent 50% of his day in a self-contained classroom. In middle school, Lance spent 100% of his day in a self-contained

classroom, but during high school, he gradually spent more time in a general education setting. Tasha, Lance, and Quan were all diagnosed with autism by the time they were 3 years old. Lance had a low level of support needs and was very talkative and friendly. Tasha and Quan primarily spoke in shorter sentences and, sometimes, in one- to two-word responses. Tasha, Lance, and Quan all received speech and occupational therapy services at the time of the study (See Table 1).

Three Black mothers participated in this study alongside their children. Black mothers have historically participated in autism research at higher rates than Black fathers (i.e., Dababnah et al., 2018; Lovelace et al., 2018; Singh, 2023).

Table 2  
*Parent Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Marital Status	Education	No. of Children
Ms. Wilson	F	Divorced	College degree	2
Ms. Jones	F	Single	Some college	1
Ms. Miller	F	Widowed	College degree	3

Ms. Wilson and Ms. Miller were college graduates, while Ms. Jones had some college experience, although she did not complete the degree. All three of the mothers were single. One was divorced, one was widowed, and one never married.

### **Setting**

As Chirgwin (2015) suggested, the case study method “provides the opportunity for those researched to define the terms of engagement in their own way” (p. 598) To this end, the participants had the authority to identify locations and times that suited their schedules and preferences. In particular, parental preference determined the interview location, in line with the reported best practice (Shaia et al., 2017 Stafford, 2017). As Soohoo (2013) suggested, research

is sometimes reliant on an invitation, particularly when it involves visits to personal spaces. Therefore, I entered the participants' spaces with humility and deference.

Table 3  
*Youth Interview Details*

Participant	Student Voice					Interviews	Type	Total Interview Time (Minutes)
	MTM Q	MAT	ABP	IEP				
Tasha Wilson	x		x	x		2	In-Person	120 (60 + 60)
Lance Jones	x	x	x			2	Zoom	33 (9 + 24)
Quan Miller		x		x		2	In-Person	120 (60 + 60)

*Note.* MTMQ–My Teacher and Me Questionnaire, MAT–Me at School Activity, ABP–Asset-Based Protocol, IEP–Individual Education Plan.

Tasha was interviewed twice in her home alongside her mother, Ms. Wilson. Each interview lasted 60 minutes. Lance was interviewed twice virtually alongside his mother, Ms. Jones. My first interview with Lance lasted 25 minutes. My second interview lasted nine minutes. Quan was interviewed twice alongside Ms. Miller, and each interview lasted 60 minutes (see Table 3).

### **Data Collection**

As illustrated in Figure 4, the data were collected from multiple stakeholders to support data triangulation. As illustrated in Figure 4, multiple data sources were employed to address each RQ.

Figure 4  
*Data Sources for Research Questions*

RQ1: How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?

- Interviews
- My Teacher and Me Questionnaire (Losh et al., 2022) (Appendix G)
- Me at School Activity (Goodall, 2018) (Appendix I)
- Asset Based Protocol (Clark & Adams, 2020) (Appendix H)
- Individual Education Plan (IEP)

RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?

- Phone Screening (Appendix B)
- Parent Pre-Interview Survey (Appendix C)
- Parent Demographic Survey (Appendix D)
- Parent Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (Leadbitter et al., 2018) (Appendix E)
- Individual Education Plan (IEP)

All of the data sources used to answer the specific RQs were integral to the collective raw data that were utilized in the data analysis. The tools used to capture the youth voices are identified in Figure 4.

The data collection for this multiple-case study included the utilization of several questionnaires and surveys and reviews of two participant IEPs. A consolidated list of all of the data sources and interview durations for all of the participants is included in Table 4. Numerous instruments and data sources were utilized in this study, as documented in Figure 5. The elements that constituted each case are reflected in Table 4. Each individual case study was built as a stand-alone single-case study, and the studies were collectively utilized to form the multiple-case study as a whole.

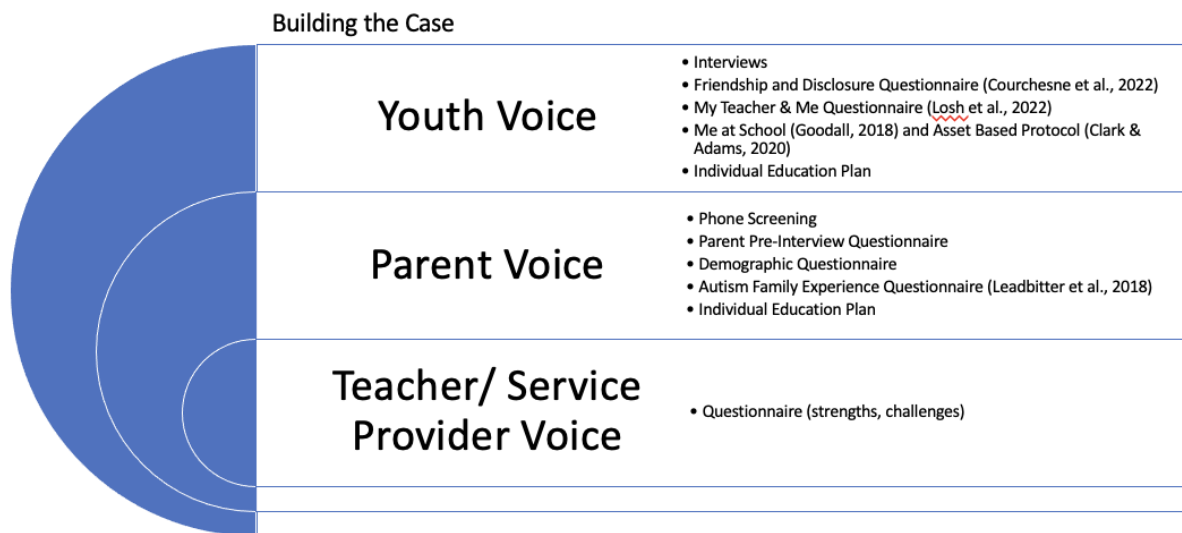
Table 4  
*Consolidated Data Sources Across Participants*

Participant	Parent Voice					Student Voice		Teacher		Interviews	Total Interview Time (Minutes)
	Phone Screen	PPES	PDS	AFEQ	MTMQ	MAT	ABP	TSPQ	IEP		
Tasha Wilson/ Ms. Wilson	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	2	120
Lance Jones/ Ms. Jones	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		3	57
Quan Miller/ Ms. Miller	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	2	120

*Note:* PPES—Parent Pre-Interview Survey, PDS—Parent Demographic Survey, AFEQ—Autism Family Experience Questionnaire, TSPQ—Teacher/Service-Provider Questionnaire, IEP—Individualized Education Plan, MTMQ—My Teacher and Me Questionnaire, MAT—Me at School Activity, ABP—Asset-Based Protocol

The data collection instruments were designed to elicit the youth voices, their parents’ voices, and teacher or service providers’ perspectives. I discuss the steps I used to gather the participants’ voices below. Different instruments were utilized to capture the youth, parents’, and teacher or service providers’ voices (see Figure 5). For a list of the study procedures, see Appendix A.

Figure 5  
*Youth, Parent, and Teacher/Service-Provider Voices and Data Sources*



### Youth Voices

Capturing the voices of the Black autistic youth was fundamental to this study. The Black autistic youth were interviewed for this study over the course of two separate interview sessions, which were designed as activity-based interviews (Stafford, 2017; Winstone et al., 2014). Each interview was adapted based on the specific needs of the youth, according to the feedback provided by each parent in the Pre-Interview Survey (see Appendix D). Chess has been shown to be an effective game for working with autistic youth (Sala & Gobet, 2016). Therefore, to facilitate rapport building, I designed an introduction-to-chess curriculum as a way to expose each student to chess and build rapport, with the goal of building a relationship with each autistic youth. However, we were unable to embed the chess component of the interviews due to scheduling conflicts. Given the diverse communication abilities of each youth, several tools designed to elicit autistic students' voices were utilized.

The study was designed with an intentionally flexible approach to the data collection, given the differences in terms of the youth capabilities and autism presentations. For example,

because none of the parents in the study had explicitly discussed autism and their child's diagnosis with their child, as evidenced by the Parent Pre-Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix D), I did not use the Friendship and Disclosure Questionnaire (see Appendix K). The Friendship and Disclosure Questionnaire was designed to investigate the ways in which autistic youth understand autism, their diagnosis, and how they discuss autism with their parents and others, such as friends at school. This would have been important information for a study about the educational experiences of autistic youth. However, in compliance with my IRB approval, since the parents had not held these discussions, I informed the IRB that I would not engage in a line of questioning regarding autism disclosure with the youth and would not utilize the Friendship and Disclosure Questionnaire (see Appendix K). I included this appendix in this study as a tool for future researchers to consider utilizing in their work with autistic youth.

The My Teacher and Me Questionnaire (see Appendix H), a 15-question paper-and-pencil questionnaire designed for and validated in a population of autistic children, was used to gain insights into how the youth perceived their relationships with their teachers (Losh, Eisenhower, & Blacher, 2022). Tasha and Lance completed the My Teacher and Me Questionnaire. However, Quan did not. Nevertheless, Tasha, Lance, and Quan all completed the Me at School (see Appendix J) activity, which captures how students view themselves in their educational settings (Goodall, 2018). Lastly, the youth were asked to complete an Asset-Based Protocol (see Appendix I) question set designed with a strength-based focus, in which participants are asked how they conceptualize their positive attributes (Clark & Adams, 2020). As anticipated, the youth had different communication strengths and abilities, which greatly influenced the data collection process.

## **Parents' Voices**

As noted above, the parents participated in a phone-screening process to ensure eligibility for the study. After the phone screening and eligibility confirmation, the parents completed informed-consent documentation for themselves and their children. Additionally, a Parent Pre-Interview Survey (see Appendix D) was utilized to gain insights from the parents regarding their child's interests, likes and dislikes, and communication preferences to gain further in-depth information about the autistic youth. This information helped to inform and individualize my approach with each student based on specific feedback from their respective parents.

Additionally, the parents completed a Parent Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix E), which provided details about their educational levels and marital statuses. Lastly, the parents completed the Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (Leadbitter et al., 2018; see Appendix F). The AFEQ is a 48-question instrument designed to provide insights into the experiences of families raising autistic youth. These tools were informative, contextual, and essential for understanding the parents' perspectives and insights. Each instrument was first electronically forwarded to each parent via Qualtrics. However, material was also provided via email and hardcopy during in-person meetings if it had not been completed prior to these meetings.

## **Teacher/Service Providers' Voices**

In addition, information from the participants' teachers and support specialists was requested. For this process, the parents were asked whether they were willing to ask a teacher or service provider to complete a questionnaire regarding their experiences with working with their children. The parents were then asked to forward the survey to potential teacher or service provider participants. The teachers and service providers for each student were asked to complete a questionnaire. Lance's former speech therapist completed the questionnaire, as did Tasha's

current one-on-one autism-support professional at her church. Understanding a teacher or service provider’s relationships with, attitudes toward, and beliefs about their autistic youth can be especially important in the context of building a case study about the educational experiences of autistic youth.

Figure 6  
*Research Questions, Data Collection Tools, and Theoretical Framework*

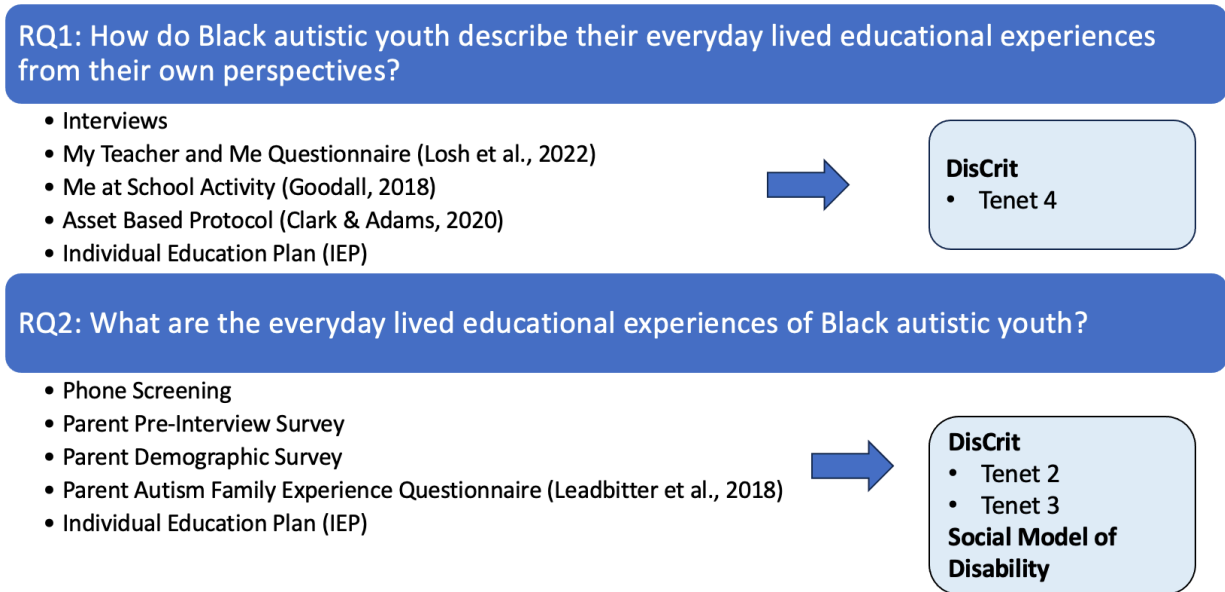


Figure 6 illustrates the data collection instruments that were utilized pursuant to RQ1 and RQ2. Additionally, Figure 6 reflects how the DisCrit tenets informed data analysis. For example, DisCrit Tenet 4 privileges the voices of marginalized groups. In this study, the My Teacher and Me questionnaire and other listed tools were utilized to pursue Black autistic youth voice in line with Tenet 4. Furthermore, DisCrit Tenet 2 concerns the multi-dimensional nature of identity, and the phone screening, parent pre-interview survey along with the IEP was employed to gain an understanding of each youth from their parent’s perspective. Also, DisCrit Tenet 3 was concerned with the social construction of disability similar to the social model of disability, and

the Autism Family Experience Questionnaire, along with other listed instruments, informed my understanding of how prior social experiences have influenced each youth.

### **Interview Protocol**

Each interview was designed to begin with me and the youth playing a game and engaging in a learning activity, after which the participants completed questionnaires, instruments, or activities designed to form a complete view of their experiences. However, the parents participated in each interview and facilitated rapport between me and the youth. The priority during the interviews and data collection process was to establish rapport between me and the youth (see Fayette & Bond, 2018). Where possible, the interviews were recorded. In total, I conducted seven interviews for this study. Each interview ranged from 9 to 90 minutes ( $\bar{x}$  = 42 minutes; see Tables 1 and 3). Several questionnaires and protocols previously used with autistic youth were utilized during the interviews (see Figure 4). These instruments were utilized before they were developed for autistic youth with various and diverse communication styles. In preparation for each interview, all of the interview questions were consolidated across the instruments and provided to the youth and their mothers. The participants were able to engage by drawing, writing, and using other response modalities, such as pointing to answers; they were therefore not limited by traditional interview designs, which favor only verbal responses (Courchesne et al., 2022; Tesfaye et al., 2019). However, each youth participated via verbal responses in this study.

The data collection procedures were responsive to the communication capabilities of each child and adjusted accordingly, as in the approach discussed by Pater et al. (2021) in their intervention study. In other words, when youth were unable to respond to or uninterested in answering specific questions, the questions were restated and skipped if restating them did not

help. Furthermore, when the youth seemed tired, agitated, or uninterested, the interviews were abbreviated and rescheduled. Email was frequently used to coordinate the interviews, follow up, and reschedule meetings when they were canceled. Meeting cancellations became an issue during the data collection. Each family canceled at least one meeting, and two of the families canceled and rescheduled numerous meetings. The families attributed these cancellations to work, family emergencies, and, in one instance, Bible study. Interestingly, text messaging was the families' preferred method of communication. Information of significance distributed through text messaging was captured during my ongoing memo-writing efforts.

### **IEPs**

In an effort to collect rich and comprehensive data from various sources, I asked Ms. Jones, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Wilson to each provide a hardcopy of their child's most recent IEP and to remove any identifiable information by using a permanent marker or correction fluid on the IEP. I received IEPs for Tasha and Quan. Ms. Jones, Lance's mother, said that she was not comfortable sharing the IEP. I reviewed Tasha and Quan's IEPs and coded them based on asset-based (positive feedback related to the student) or deficit-based (negative feedback) language.

The families received a \$100 e-gift card upon completion of the interview process. The gift cards were forwarded to Ms. Jones, Ms. Wilson, and Ms. Miller directly rather than to Tasha, Quan, or Lance. The teachers or service providers received a \$25 e-gift card upon the completion of the teacher survey.

### **Data Analysis**

I performed the data analysis concurrently with data collection. This involved numerous steps, including data collection via interviews and observations, memo-writing after each interview or meeting with a family, processing instrument data, reviewing recordings and

transcripts of recordings where applicable, coding transcripts, and analyzing data. Each case study was coded and analyzed individually as a separate case study. This choice was intentional since I wanted each case study to stand on its own merit, representing the unique experience of each youth. The data analysis was iterative (Richards, 2022) and ongoing and began immediately after the initial interview (Maxwell, 2013). I wrote memos immediately after each meeting with parents and the youth. Furthermore, I wrote additional memos while reviewing instrument data and questionnaire responses throughout the study in order to investigate and interrogate the data as I engaged with it. Where applicable, Zoom was utilized for transcription, and I reviewed each transcript for accuracy.

The coding process included the following: (a) analysis and coding of the surveys by identifying codes and consolidating them into themes, (b) the transcription of the interview data, as well as the analysis and coding of these data and the consolidation of these codes into themes, (c) the writing of memos in response to survey and interview data, and (d) the analysis of IEP data and its coding into themes. This process occurred three times independently for each case study. As Richards (2022) argued, the “boundaries between codes, categories, and themes are fuzzy” (p. 158). Given the subjective nature of the coding and the thematic analysis, I used the RQs to help me determine themes that related to the RQs in this study. The themes were, therefore, created in response to the study’s RQs. Together, the aforementioned data were utilized to develop a codebook. The creation of this codebook was iterative and followed an inductive process (Yin, 2018). A unique codebook was created for each case study. I printed the codebook and read and reread it to fully familiarize myself with the data. The original codes were re-coded after a secondary analysis, and these codes were collapsed and combined into higher-level themes through a generative and iterative process (Adu, 2019; Bingham &

Witkowsky, 2022). After creating and refining my codebook, I began the process of “explanation building” (Yin, 2018, p. 179) to make sense of the data by postulating explanations. This process was used to develop narrative renderings of the dataset for each case’s data. An example of my coding process is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5  
*Examples of Code and Theme Development*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Re-Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Example</b>
Teacher perception	Active participation	<b>Seeking affirmation</b>	“He also loves going to the board writing math problems and working with his teachers.” “Likes to have work checked. He likes to receive high fives when he completes math problems”
Assessment data	Deficit-based descriptions	<b>Deficit-based educational ideas</b>	“This deficit negatively impacts his ability to perform grade level math in the general education classroom at this time.” Assessment permeated with deficit language “very poor” or “low” or “significant delays”—this language or variations thereof are used over 100 times within the IEP
Joking behavior	Student voice	<b>Affiliative humor</b>	[Tell me about the best part about school.] “The best part is that I skip school. Yeah, that’s the best part I ever did,” [What makes you happy at school?] “Oh, being silly.”

## Quality Indicators

I used data triangulation to enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the data. Scholars have pointed out the importance of data triangulation and collecting data from multiple sources, not only for autistic children, in support of data integrity (Preece, 2002). Data triangulation is the process of not only collecting data from multiple sources but also comparing and contrasting these data and “using different methods as a check on one another” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). This process of triangulation, using multiple sources of data, is essential for confirming data and evidence, and the consideration of data in conjunction with competing and complementary data is essential (Yin, 2018). It is through the convergence and nonconvergence of these data that findings take shape. Additionally, the multiple-case study design strengthens

the reliability and value of a case study project, and I compare multiple cases to shed light on the details and nuances of each case (see Gustafsson, 2017). Furthermore, memo-writing is a quality indicator for rigorous qualitative research, which I used as an audit trail to document analytical processes, decision-making, and my reflections on the data (Dababnah et al., 2018; Mihas, 2022; Shaia et al., 2020).

Multiple sources of data were gathered and utilized to construct each case in this multiple-case study. The procedures were utilized to help guide and formalize the data collection; however, maximum flexibility was given in order to adapt to each student, student ability, and family need. Given the characteristics of autism, such as differences in uses of verbal language, multiple instruments were intentionally used in an effort to gather the maximum amount of information based on the instruments used in the study. Given the scope of the data received from multiple stakeholders (youth, parents, and teachers), the information in this study was triangulated, which helped to contextualize and strengthen each case.

### **Case Record**

To help organize the data, I created a case record, which can be defined as a detailed catalog with which to organize raw data (Patton, 2015). Names were removed from all the paperwork (such as IEPs), and all the electronic or hardcopy data were anonymized and given case numbers. A case record is an organizing tool that is one step above raw data, and it is used to begin the process of developing and writing a case study. Stenhouse (1975/1997) suggested that the case record “is a condensation of the case data” (p. 537)—or, in other words, that it is a process for tabulating the raw data that will subsequently comprise the case. For this study, the case records were developed for each case to ensure that the data collection and organization were consistent and that the data sources were as uniform as possible.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Children are particularly vulnerable in research, and children with disabilities may be at even greater risk of harm. Therefore, protection for the autistic participants was at the core of this research design in order to ensure their safety and anonymity. Several protective steps were implemented. All the questionnaires and data were de-identified, and a pseudonym was assigned to each participant. The parental and service-provider information was tracked with the pseudonym or case record number. The parental screening process was used to determine the youth behavior traits and triggers so that their interviews could be designed to alleviate anxiety to the greatest extent possible. Furthermore, the parents were encouraged to support their children during the interview process. Additionally, child assent was requested at the beginning of each interview. Lastly, the participants received a stop card that they could use at any time to discontinue the interview (Courchesne et al., 2022). Maxwell (2013) asserted that all research is “to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of the participants in your study” (p. 92). I was mindful of this intrusion, but I believed that gaining insights into the perspectives of Black autistic youth outweighed the potential risks, given that the voices of this population are absent from the literature.

## **Conclusion**

I utilized multiple-case study methods through a DisCrit framework to engage with Black autistic youth voices. Further, I asked parents and teachers to provide insights about their understanding of the youth educational experiences. These data were analyzed and used to create three detailed case studies. In the next chapter, these cases are discussed.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This multiple-case study examined the educational experiences of Black autistic youth through a DisCrit framework in dialogue with the social model of disability through the lens of educational equity and investigated the following RQs:

1. How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?
2. What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?

A major goal in this study was to capture the voices of Black autistic youth. My conception of voice was not limited to verbal language, and it includes any communication that expresses the interests, perceptions, and perspectives of Black autistic youth. To this end, I sought insights from each of the three youth whom I interviewed.

In this chapter, I present three case study narratives and sets of research findings. Subsequently, through cross-case analysis, I analyze the findings from each case in the context of the others. To gain an in-depth understanding of the educational experiences of Black autistic youth, I interviewed the youth alongside their parents, solicited background information through questionnaires, reviewed the students' IEPs, and asked teachers or service providers to complete questionnaires about the students in the study. Mothers and teachers were asked to share their perceptions of the educational experiences of Black autistic youth in this study. The emergent themes included unmet school-service needs, disability hierarchy and the negative effects of parental shielding, and autism-specific challenges. Furthermore, themes of positive educational experiences and the impact of significant others, along with the positive effects of parental shielding on the students, were present in the data. Vignettes were developed to contextualize

each case, which is a typical approach in case studies (Patton, 2015). The findings are reported for each case study.

## **Case Descriptions**

### ***Case Study 1: Tasha Wilson***

Tasha is a 14-year-old ninth-grader. She has an older sister in the 10th grade at the same school. Tasha enjoys dancing, listening to music, and watching cartoons, such as *Sesame Street* and *Princess Lily*, on her tablet. Tasha loves to swim and ride her bike. She especially enjoys French toast sticks and McDonald's French fries. When I first interviewed Tasha at her home, I met her mother, grandmother, and sister. Tasha had just had her hair styled into an elaborate braided pattern. Tasha was very shy and even bashful during our first meeting, but she opened up somewhat when I asked her about the cartoons she liked to watch. Tasha sometimes speaks in sentence fragments or with one- or two-word responses. She is very polite, and Ms. Wilson, her mother, made her read the interview questions out loud during our first meeting. I suspect that this was in order to show me that Tasha could read well.

Tasha was officially diagnosed with autism at 36 months, although Ms. Wilson reported that she knew Tasha was autistic when she was 24 months old. Ms. Wilson stated that Tasha was not developing or growing in the same way as her older sister had, and she demonstrated delays in her linguistic and behavioral development. Ms. Wilson stated that something was simply “not right,” which was her catalyst for getting Tasha evaluated. Tasha's parents are divorced but remain close and co-parent their children.

According to Ms. Wilson, preschool was difficult for Tasha because her teachers were inexperienced in working with autistic children. Ms. Wilson was so concerned that she became a preschool teacher at the school to help her daughter. Ms. Wilson stated that this time was

difficult because “everyone was just beginning to learn about autism.” However, Ms. Wilson focused on learning as much about autism as she could.

In pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, Tasha learned alongside her typically developing peers. However, during first grade, Tasha was moved to a self-contained classroom. Ms. Wilson thought that the elementary school was “excellent” despite the fact that its classrooms were often mostly composed of male students with autism. There was usually only one additional female student in Tasha’s classroom.

Ms. Wilson was an advocate for her daughter and supported Tasha’s educational experiences as effectively as possible. For example, initially, Tasha was assigned to a middle school that was an hour’s bus ride away from her home. Ms. Wilson did not want her to ride a bus for this long and requested that Tasha be allowed to attend the same school as her older sister. Although Mrs. Wilson’s request was denied, she continued to advocate and petitioned the superintendent. Eventually, Ms. Wilson was successful, and Tasha was assigned to her local school. Ms. Wilson thought that the first 2 years of middle school were superb. Tasha’s sixth- and seventh-grade teachers were excellent. Ms. Wilson felt that the teacher had a highly positive relationship with the students and that she also pushed them academically. Additionally, Tasha’s older sister also attended the school, where she was very popular. In addition, Tasha’s older sister was also in the gifted-and-talented program. Whenever Tasha’s sister’s friends saw her, they spoke to her. Tasha called all of her sister’s friends her friends. In addition to a very effective teacher, Tasha had a social network via her sister.

However, eighth grade would prove more difficult for Tasha. In eighth grade, Tasha was assigned a new teacher and new teacher’s aides. Ms. Wilson stated that the school did not notify her that new special-education teachers were assigned to Tasha, and that she found out on her

own when she tried to email the previous teacher. Ms. Wilson liked the new teacher and especially how she “loved on” her daughter, but worried that “she was more motherly than teacherly like she was somebody’s aunt.” In addition, her sister started high school. Not only did Tasha have a new teacher, but she also lost her sister. These changes led to school refusal, bouts of crying, and an increase in truancy. In fact, the teacher would have to call Ms. Wilson to collect Tasha when she started crying because she became inconsolable. This occurred on more than one occasion. Ms. Wilson indicated that her daughter did not necessarily elope but would wander off if the teacher were not attentive. Nevertheless, Ms. Wilson increasingly reported that her daughter had wandered off at school on multiple occasions.

Eighth grade presented further challenges in that Tasha’s sister was now in high school. Tasha began to experience some bullying and isolation on the bus ride to school, as well as in the classroom. A hearing-impaired boy of whom Tasha was fond and wanted to sit beside on the bus did not want to sit with her. Tasha would often tap the boy on his shoulder to solicit his attention, but the boy did not want to talk to her, nor did he want her to sit next to him. Other children on the bus started to tease the boy about Tasha, which upset him, and whenever Tasha attempted to engage him by tapping on his shoulder, the boy would grow upset. This escalated as the other children on the bus would tease him about his “girlfriend.” This teasing continued into the classroom, and the boy would sign to his interpreter that he did not want her sitting near him on the bus or in the classroom. Tasha’s classmates would laugh at her.

Teachers reported to Ms. Wilson that Tasha was bullying the student with the hearing impairment, and Tasha was told to leave him alone. Ms. Wilson was perplexed to learn that her daughter was “bullying” another student. However, Ms. Wilson did not take this “bullying” report at face value and spoke with the bus driver, who had known Tasha for 3 years. Through

this conversation, Ms. Wilson learned that Tasha had a crush on the boy and that the incident had been overblown. Ms. Wilson's response to the teachers was, "You guys have to teach her behavioral skills toward other children with different disabilities just like they have to be taught the behavioral skills to her because of her disability."

Tasha did not have many friends at school and was not invited to the birthday parties of any of her classmates. At an evening event at the school, Tasha was in the chorus with her classmates, performing a song, but Tasha's mother noticed how no one wanted to sit near her. Ms. Wilson stated that the nearest child was "6 feet away." She further noted that "they don't want to be next to her. Kids isolating her and making her move seats. There is no one for her in that space during that time," which was heartbreaking for her. Ms. Wilson made the chorus teacher aware of what had taken place and how everyone was treating her daughter. She disliked how these children were treating her daughter as though she were "dirty." At this point, Tasha's school behavior started to make sense to Ms. Wilson. Her daughter was isolated and alone.

Tasha has significant challenges with expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language, according to her IEP. Furthermore, Ms. Wilson indicated that Tasha was "low-functioning." Ms. Wilson understands that some dislike functioning labels but believes that it is accurate in Tasha's case because of the level of continued support her daughter needs in order to stay safe. Furthermore, Ms. Wilson believes that Tasha "still functions as a third-grader as far as math is concerned."

Eighth grade was a particularly challenging year for Tasha at school, in part because she had a new teacher but also because her sister, a key support for her, had moved on to high school. However, Ms. Wilson is looking forward to high school because Tasha will be in the same building as her sister again.

**Interview Context.** I interviewed Tasha twice, for a total of 120 minutes, and each interview was vastly different. During my first interview with Tasha, her mother, grandmother, sister, and even a hairdresser (braiding Tasha’s hair, as well as that of her sister) were present. Tasha was shy and hesitant in answering my questions. Ms. Wilson frequently chimed in to restate questions that I asked. However, during the second interview, Tasha was very talkative and answered all my questions. Ms. Wilson informed me that she had promised Tasha McDonald’s if she participated and answered my questions and this reward was effective in improving Tasha’s participation. At the start of the second interview, Ms. Wilson stated that she did not know whether Tasha would speak to me. However, Tasha spoke up: “I can speak, I can speak.” This was the first time that I had witnessed Tasha display agency and speak up for herself. In fact, she answered all of my questions during the interview. At the end of the interview, she even hugged me. This surprised Ms. Wilson, and she became emotional.

**Research Question 1: How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?**

The main theme that emerged from speaking with Tasha was that she was fond of her teacher, with whom she had a positive relationship. Because RQ1 was based on the student perspective or voice (see Table 4), the information used to develop this theme was based on the data Tasha provided. Specifically, this theme was developed based on survey and interview data (see Table 4 and Figure 4).

**Positive Student–Teacher Relationship.** It has been argued that teachers have the greatest impact on learning outcomes for students (Worrell, 2022). During our interviews, utilizing the Me and My Teacher Questionnaire (see Appendix H), Tasha indicated that she liked her teacher and could ask her teacher for help. This questionnaire was specifically designed to

capture student perceptions of the student–teacher relationship. While I started the Me and My Teacher Questionnaire during my initial interview with Tasha, I finished collecting data for this instrument during our second interview. Tasha expressed that her teacher also liked her and listened to her. In addition, Tasha believed that when she was having a difficult day, her teacher would help her feel better. Tasha stated that her teacher was “terrific.” Tasha’s answers were supported by her mother’s perspective that her eighth-grade teacher “loved on” her and that “she was more motherly than teacherly, like she was somebody’s aunt.” Despite difficulties in adjusting to the eighth grade without her sister and working with a new teacher, Tasha still felt that she had a good relationship with her teacher. Furthermore, when asked, “What do you like about yourself?” she answered, “I am not alone.”

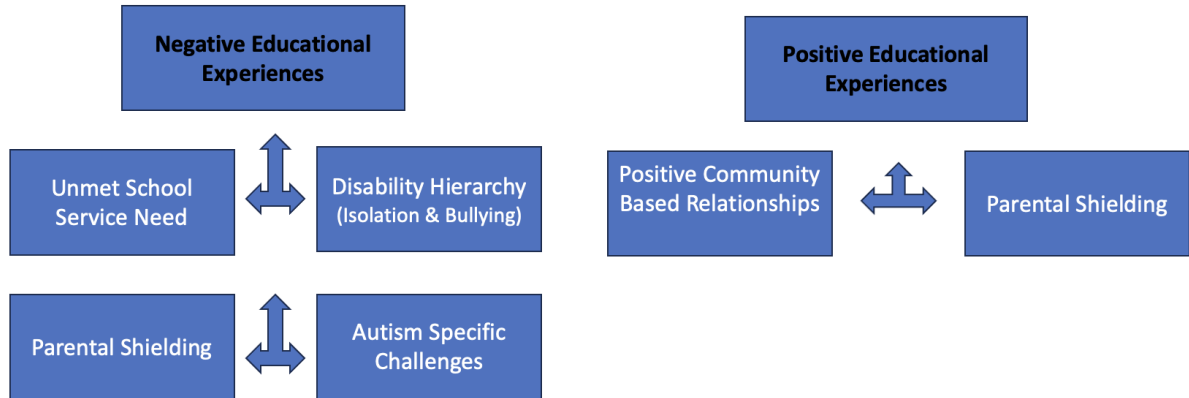
Tenet 4 of DisCrit privileges the voices of marginalized individuals. The perspectives, opinions, and attitudes of Black autistic youth are absent from the literature. My goal in speaking directly to Tasha was to gain insights into her feelings and experiences. I listened to Tasha’s voice and discovered that she values her relationship with her teacher.

### **Research Question 2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?**

While RQ1 was informed by the perspectives and voices of Black autistic in this study, RQ2 was informed by parental and teacher/service-provider feedback (see Figure 5). The parent data from the interviews, Parent Pre-Interview Survey (see Appendix D), Parent Demographic Survey (Appendix E), and Parent Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (see Appendix F) informed these themes for RQ2. Additionally, the teacher and service-provider information was drawn from the Teacher/Service Provider Questionnaire for FQ2 (see Appendix L).

Figure 7

Case Study 1: Tasha Wilson—RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?



**Negative Educational Experiences.** My RQs were concerned with the educational experiences of Black autistic youth, and I organized my themes accordingly. For example, the everyday lived educational experiences of the Black autistic youth were characterized under negative educational experiences or positive educational experiences. The specific negative educational experiences for Tasha included unmet school-service needs, disability hierarchy, parental shielding, and autism-specific challenges.

**Unmet School-Service Need.** One set of negative educational experiences was unmet school-service needs. The intensity and frequency of support and intervention are important for autistic youth. Tasha’s IEP documented significant language and speech delays and challenges with expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language. However, the IEP did not include high-intensity speech-and-language-therapy support from a speech and language pathologist (SLP). The IEP states, “The SLP will provide teacher consultation, classroom observation, and/or check in with Tasha as needed (at least once per month.)” This level of support, “at least once per month,” is not commensurate with the level of need indicated by the IEP. Given that Tasha

needed a high level of speech-and-language support, the level of support she was provided needed to match her level of need. During an applied behavioral analysis class, a professor suggested that “the intensity of the intervention must equal the intensity of the problem” (E. Sabornie, personal communication, December 5, 2019). If a student has significant delays, they require significant intervention. If a student has significant speech and language concerns, they must have significant speech-therapy support. Therefore, the frequency of spoken-language support is insufficient, and her needs are not being met.

**Disability Hierarchy.** Another negative school experience included a disability hierarchy. I define disability hierarchy as the overarching social structure amongst peers based on the severity or presentation of disability characteristics, in which individuals with less pronounced disabilities sit at the top of the social structure. Previous studies considered the implications of disability hierarchies both from the perspective of nondisabled individuals’ perceptions of the disabled and disabled groups’ perceptions of other disability groups (Deal, 2003). During my interviews with Ms. Wilson, she pointed out that Tasha was experiencing isolation and teasing that might be approaching bullying. Ms. Wilson provided two examples of her child being singled out and isolated based on her autism. For instance, Ms. Wilson asserted that she watched her daughter being treated “dirty” during a school performance. Specifically, Ms. Wilson watched from the audience as Tasha’s classmates made her switch seats when they were on the stage for their singing performance so that she would be seated away from everyone else. During the show, it was easily recognizable that no one wanted to be near Tasha, according to Ms. Wilson. Ms. Wilson stated that “they stand at least 6 feet away from her. They don’t want to be next to her.” In addition, Ms. Wilson mentioned, “Sometimes I have to have her come up and sit next to me instead of sitting with the chorus because they’re not nice kids.” These two

comments suggest that, within her classroom, Tasha may have experienced the effects of a classroom disability hierarchy.

In another instance, Ms. Wilson reported learning from a teacher's assistant that Tasha had a crush on a classmate named Tommy. Tasha and Tommy ride the bus together and are peers in the same classroom. Because Tommy is hearing-impaired, Tasha frequently witnesses other students tap him on his shoulder to gain his attention. However, Tommy did not want Tasha sitting next to him on the bus or in class. Tasha attempted to tap Tommy on his shoulder to gain his attention on multiple occasions, but this was interpreted as hitting by a teacher's aide. Tommy communicated to his interpreter that he did not want to sit next to Tasha and that he did not want her trying to talk to him. Tasha was then assigned to a seat on the other side of the classroom, away from Tommy. Tasha's classmates often teased her during this time. While Tasha was trying to form a connection and communicate with Tommy, her classmates mocked her. Ms. Wilson felt that Tasha was punished for trying to connect with one of her peers, but because of Tasha's language differences and the student's hearing impairment, she was not able to effectively communicate with him. The fact that Tasha's classmates responded with laughter and teasing was isolating and confusing because Tasha knew that Tommy could not hear and that other classmates tapped him on his shoulder to get his attention. Ms. Wilson noted, "It is strange [that] even in a room with kids with disabilities, my daughter is still the one who got picked on." Given Tasha's communication differences, her classmates may be isolating her because, in this class of disabled youth, Tasha's disability may be more pronounced, placing her, in a sense, at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

This situation can be interpreted through the double-empathy problem, which was first proposed by Milton (2012), who argued that just as non-autistic individuals may have challenges

in understanding autistic individuals, autistic individuals may have challenges understanding non-autistic people. The double-empathy problem suggests a duality in communication challenges. The solution to this shared miscommunication problem is not solely the responsibility of autistic youth. I expanded this notion of the double-empathy problem to suggest that youth with disabilities may experience intradisability communications miscues similar to those suggested by Milton. Tasha may experience the impact of this double-empathy barrier to social participation with her classmates with autism and other disabilities.

**Parental Shielding.** I define parental shielding as the process in which parents protect, support, and encourage their child in ways that may unintentionally hinder or limit them. Parental shielding is a form of parental advocacy. In a large meta-synthesis on parental advocacy for autistic youth, Boshoff et al. (2016) asserted that there is variability in how advocacy is defined in the literature. The authors broadly define advocacy as “being a voice for their child” (p. 785), as well as educating others about autism, pursuing support and services, and facilitating well-being across the family. Others have discussed this phenomenon in the context of parents raising children with disabilities and how shielding can have unintentional consequences, such as lowered expectations (Sanders, 2006). In attempting to safeguard their children, parents may “shield” them, and this shielding, or overprotection, “can lead to unnecessarily sheltering from normal consequences” (Sanders, 2006, p. 182), which may hinder a child’s growth. Previous studies discussed some of the ways in which Black mothers with autistic children advocate for their youth and some of the challenges that these mothers experience (Dababnah et al., 2018; Lovelace et al., 2018; Singh, 2023). For example, Burkett et al. (2015) identified “protective care” as an important action undertaken by African American families in support of autistic youth, in which families are “watchful of their child’s safety in multiple settings” (p. 3248).

Children with autism often require parents to be diligent and committed to their protection. Parents must walk a fine line between guarding their children against harm and depriving them of opportunities to engage in social, interpersonal, or academic development. In this regard, Burkett et al. (2015) expanded the idea of protective care to also include supporting autistic youth independence. However, parents with autistic youth have legitimate reasons to be highly protective of their children if their safety is at risk. For example, during her interview, Ms. Wilson explained that since Tasha has been known to elope from school, she needs to be mindful of always keeping her at arm's length when they go to busy or high-traffic areas to ensure that Tasha does not wander off or dart into traffic. Parental shielding was present in both negative and positive forms in this case. However, more recently, Ms. Wilson was unsure as to whether she should allow Tasha to attend a high-school orientation and pep rally. Ms. Wilson worried about Tasha and thought, "If she gives me push back and wants to leave and go home, we can. But then I was like, why am I doing this? I'm not gonna even do that to myself. I know who she is. I know she's not gonna even be bothered with all of that." In this case, Ms. Wilson decided against taking time off work and taking Tasha to the orientation and the pep rally with other students because she feared that Tasha may have become disinterested or demonstrated a behavioral problem and chose to leave. Therefore, Ms. Wilson decided to shield Tasha from these potential experiences.

**Autism-Specific Challenges.** I am aware that the concept of autism-specific challenges may be controversial or even offensive to some. Autism is a part of an individual's identity. It is not a problem; it is part of who a person is. I am careful not to promote the medical model of disability that paints autism as a problem to be fixed. However, there are real-world challenges associated with autism characteristics. As mentioned above, truancy presents significant safety

concerns for many autistic youth, which need to be addressed. Ms. Wilson reported incidents in which Tasha eloped from school, and her teachers were unable to find her. Tasha's elopement is an autism-specific challenge.

As documented in the IEP and by Ms. Wilson, Tasha's challenges with expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language further complicated her ability to navigate school. In addition, Tasha's differences in communication may contribute to difficulties in navigating social interactions at school, including making connections with her peers. Ms. Wilson did not blame Tasha for her communication differences, but she acknowledged that autism made certain concepts difficult for Tasha. For example, Ms. Wilson noted that Tasha "just interprets things differently." Ms. Wilson's hope was that other children in the school would be educated about autism and its presentation. She argued, "But there's all different levels of autism, and people don't know that, and children don't know that," which sometimes creates difficulties. Ms. Wilson felt that the ignorance of Tasha's classmates contributed to her autism-specific challenges.

Ms. Wilson acknowledged that Tasha was not "high functioning," which often made it difficult for her to state her needs. Furthermore, communication challenges sometimes made it difficult for others to know when Tasha was feeling poorly. For example, Ms. Wilson commented that sometimes, she would be requested to pick Tasha up from school because "once she started crying, she could not stop crying." Ms. Wilson's use of functioning language was directly related to the high level of support that Tasha needs day to day. I am aware that many autistic self-advocates find functioning language (high-functioning or low-functioning) ableist (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021). However, some parents may use this language when discussing

their child not to illustrate cognitive ability, but rather the level of support they need to provide for their child every day to keep them safe.

**Positive Educational Experiences.** As noted above, the parent data from the interviews, Parent Pre-Interview Survey (see Appendix D), Parent Demographic Survey (Appendix E), and Parent Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (see Appendix F) informed these themes (see Figure 5). Additionally, teacher and service-provider information was drawn from the Teacher/Service Provider Questionnaire (see Appendix L). I included positive community-based relationships and parental shielding as positive educational experiences because they were directly associated with Tasha’s learning opportunities.

Ms. Wilson reported numerous examples of positive educational experiences during our interviews. For example, Ms. Wilson thought that sixth and seventh grade were “excellent,” largely because of the quality of Tasha’s teacher. Ms. Wilson reported that Tasha had never been suspended or expelled and that before eighth grade, school had been a place that Tasha enjoyed. Ms. Wilson shared that Tasha’s older sister would often talk about autism to her friends and give presentations in class about it. Her sister’s friends were kind to Tasha and went out of their way to speak to her when they saw her in the school. Tasha would call them her “friend” whenever she saw them. Ms. Wilson indicated that Tasha knew she had people who cared about her in school.

**Positive Community-Based Relationships.** This study was concerned with exploring the educational experiences of Black autistic youth across different settings. I include positive community-based experiences under positive school experiences because Tasha received significant learning support through her church from a highly trained autism-support professional. Ms. Wilson belongs to the Christian faith; she and her daughters have attended the

same church for over a decade, in large part because the church has an expansive disability ministry. At this church, Tasha has received the same one-on-one support, Ms. Angela, since elementary school. Ms. Angela, Tasha's one-on-one aide, assigned by the church through the church's disability ministry, reported working with Tasha for 7 years. Ms. Angela reported on the teacher-service-provider questionnaire that she had an adult son with autism, that she ran an autism-support program, and that she received autism training through the UNC-Chapel Hill TEACCH Autism Program. Additionally, Ms. Angela works for an organization that provides adapted sports opportunities for people with disabilities. I learned about Ms. Angela during the data collection period when Ms. Wilson called to reschedule an interview with me, citing that Tasha "does not miss Bible study." Ms. Wilson noted that Tasha never missed Bible study on Wednesdays because of Ms. Angela. Part of the ministry included the pairing of an adult and an elementary-aged youth during the Sunday church service. Through this program, Tasha had been with the same one-on-one support staff for years. However, during middle school, the church no longer offered the same one-on-one support for children on Sundays. Tasha struggled in church without this individual support. Ms. Angela and Tasha's mother devised a solution. Ms. Angela transferred from working with the elementary-level children to supporting Wednesday night Bible study so that she could continue working with Tasha one-on-one. Ms. Angela further reported prior experience working with Tasha in the "classroom, summer camp, and outside activities." Ms. Angela has explored music, dances, games, and other learning opportunities with Tasha, reflecting how she has supported Tasha's development and learning in several capacities. On the teacher/service-provider questionnaire, Ms. Angela described Tasha as "joyful, caring," and "intelligent," She described being "encouraging, curious" and "engaging" as Tasha's strengths. When asked, "What are some things you would want a future teacher (or professional)

to know about the student?” Ms. Angela replied that Tasha was “very intelligent” and “clever” and that the most rewarding aspect of working with Tasha had been “her heart.” Understandably, Tasha was attracted to Bible study each week because she was met with kindness and expectation. While the relationship between Ms. Angela and Tasha was facilitated in a community setting, the relationship illustrates a positive educational experience.

**Parental Shielding.** As reported above, parental shielding appeared in negative and positive ways. One of the positive ways was Ms. Wilson’s fierce advocacy for Tasha. When Ms. Wilson determined that the preschool teachers could not support her autistic child, she became a teacher at the school. Another positive illustration of Ms. Wilson shielding Tasha was when Tasha was assigned to a middle school an hour’s bus ride from her home. Ms. Wilson objected because she knew the bus ride would be problematic for her daughter. Sometimes, the voices of Black mothers with autistic children are silenced (Singh, 2023). However, Ms. Wilson refused to be ignored. She appealed Tasha’s school placement all the way up to the superintendent, and she was eventually successful in securing Tasha a place in a middle school closer to their home.

Furthermore, Ms. Wilson indicated that Tasha “in some ways is like any other 14-year-old” and that she was starting to like boys. Ms. Wilson stated that she was going to put Tasha on birth control because “something might happen, and I will have no way to know if it was consensual or not.” While this led to a more complicated discussion during our interview, I interpret Ms. Wilson’s intent here as protective shielding. There is a larger discussion about sexual activity, autism, and consent that I believe is outside the scope of this paper. However, the plan to put Tasha on birth control is a protective step.

Positive and negative aspects of the educational experience of a Black autistic youth were identified. Some of the negative experiences included (a) unmet school-service needs, (b)

negative educational experiences, (c) autism-specific challenges, (d) a disability hierarchy, and (e) parental shielding. The positive educational experiences included positive community-based experiences and parental shielding.

### **Case Study 2: Lance Jones**

Lance has an autism diagnosis and no co-occurring conditions. He loves music and singing at church. He has a gregarious personality and enjoys telling jokes. His favorite color is turquoise, and he likes “reading.” He was diagnosed when he was 3 years old. He is an only child. Ms. Jones, Lance’s mother, did not enjoy the initial evaluation process because of the number of appointments and meetings she was asked to attend, which was difficult for her due to her work schedule at the time. Furthermore, she did not enjoy the assessment process because, at times, she felt that the assessors were asking her son to perform tasks that he could not, to which she responded, “Don’t force him to do it. If he can’t do it, he can’t do it.” During elementary and middle school, Lance was educated in a self-contained classroom. Ms. Jones stated that he was never in trouble at school and that if he had been, she would not have known because of an excellent African American male teacher. Ms. Jones stated that this teacher instructed his coworkers to send Lance to his classroom if he was ever having a difficult time or misbehaving, and throughout elementary school, this teacher was a “mentor” for Lance. In addition, other service providers took a special interest in Lance. A former SLP described Lance as “thoughtful, curious, and talented.” Additionally, she commented that he had “quite the sense of humor and a powerful singing voice.” Furthermore, she shared that Lance made “significant progress with communication skills both in the classroom and in the community.”

At the time of this study, Lance was a 15-year-old only child entering the 10th grade. He spent 50% of his day in a self-contained classroom, and Ms. Jones stated that he is “very verbal.”

Lance likes to tell jokes and seems to always have a smile on his face. His mother calls him “hilarious.” She is highly protective of him. Furthermore, she describes him as “high-functioning” and indicates that she can sleep well at night even when he is awake and does not have to worry about him opening the door or turning on the oven. Lance likes reading but does not enjoy math, and he does not like his math teacher. Lance has had several relationships with significant others who have taken a particular interest in him in and out of school, including his teacher, speech therapist, and occupational therapist. In fact, recently, Lance’s occupational therapist visited his church when he was recognized on youth day. Additionally, Lance has an aunt who is a teacher in his school district with whom he is close. His mother wants him to be independent when he is older.

To gain insights into the educational experiences of Black autistic youth, I conducted interviews with Lance and his mother, and I solicited survey feedback from his former SLP, who had worked with him for over 5 years. I conducted my interviews with Lance and Ms. Jones via Zoom. Ms. Jones did not want to be interviewed at her home and requested that we meet virtually. Prior to our meeting, she cautioned me that Lance might not talk to me. She commented, “He may participate, and he may not. It just, you know, kind of depends on his mood for the day.” Despite these warnings, Lance spoke with me for 24 minutes during our initial interview and 9 minutes during our second interview. While Ms. Jones was not willing to forward me a copy of his IEP, she provided ample information about his school experiences. A major theme that emerged in this case was positive educational experiences, the impact of significant others, and the asset-based language used to describe Lance.

## **Research Question 1: How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?**

In order to investigate the experiences of Black autistic youth, I spoke with Lance regarding his educational experiences. Two themes that emerged from the data were the role of positive student–teacher relationship and the use of humor.

**Positive Student–Teacher Relationship.** Since RQ1 was based on student perspective or voice (see Figure 4), the information used to develop these themes was based on data Lance provided. Specifically, these themes were developed based on a survey and an interview (see Table 4 and Figure 4). On the My Teacher and Me Questionnaire (see Appendix H), Lance reported liking his teacher, believing that his teacher liked him in turn and that his teacher made him feel better if he was having a difficult day. When asked if he gets into trouble at school, he responded with “No way” and “No I do not.” When asked if he thought his teacher was fair, he responded, “The teacher is fair to all of you.” Lance also indicated that even if his teacher was busy, he could still receive help from her.

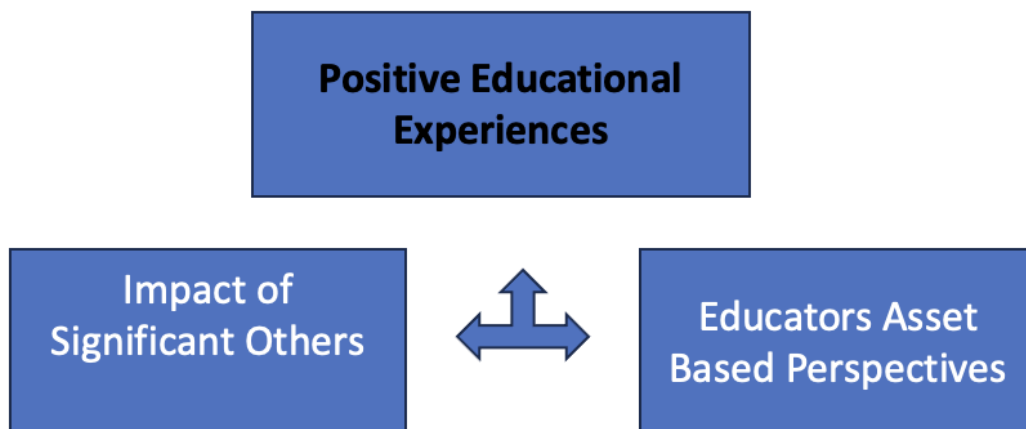
**Affiliative Humor.** A consistent emergent theme in the data was the use of affiliative humor (Martin et al., 2003). The role and use of humor were observable in the interviews with and surveys from Lance’s mother, his former speech therapist, and Lance himself. Lance’s speech therapist noted that he was “funny” and has “quite the sense of humor.” Lance, it seems, has learned to use humor as a tool for establishing relationships and connecting in educational and personal contexts. When interviewing Lance, his humor was obvious. When asked, “What is something you enjoy the most?” Lance answered, “laugh[ing] a lot.” He was gregarious and told several knock-knock jokes during our interview. When asked, “What is your favorite part of school?” Lance answered jokingly, “The best part is, I skip school,” and “Yeah, that is the best

part I ever did.” When asked, “What makes you happy at school?” Lance answered, “Being silly.” At one point during an interview, I asked Lance, “What do you enjoy most at school?” He answered: “Listening to Hezekiah Walker,” the gospel singer. Jokingly, Lance continued to answer every question with “Hezekiah Walker,” to Ms. Jones’ frustration. Ms. Jones attempted to make him stop answering questions jokingly, without success. I received the impression that Lance has learned that “being silly” is behavior that makes adults smile and is a vehicle for connecting with people.

Lance’s mother stated that he is almost always happy, and his joy was obvious during our interview time. Certainly, Lance did not answer some questions, and some of his answers were not related to the topics of the questions. However, he was able to participate in the interview, and he provided insights into himself and his relationship with his teachers.

Figure 8

*Case Study 2: Lance Jones—RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?*



While RQ1 was informed by the perspectives and voices of Black people with autism in this study, FQ2 was informed by parental feedback and teacher/service-provider feedback (see Figure 5). The parental data from the interviews, Parent Pre-Interview Survey (see Appendix D),

Parent Demographic Survey (see Appendix E), and Parent Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (see Appendix F) informed these themes (see Figure 5). Additionally, the teacher and service-provider information was drawn from the Teacher/Service-Provider Questionnaire (see Appendix L). In this case, the themes related to Lance's educational experiences included (a) positive educational experiences, (b) the role of significant others, and (c) educators' asset-based perspectives.

**Positive Educational Experiences.** During our interviews, Ms. Jones identified several positive school experiences, including her happiness with Lance's school because "it is a really good school," which Lance was able to enter as the result of a lottery. Additionally, Ms. Jones was happy with the overall IEP progress reports; she was particularly satisfied with the level of support she received from his service providers. In the morning, a bus picks Lance up directly in front of his house and drops him off in the afternoon in the same place. Overall, Ms. Jones is "happy" with the school and feels that the everyday educational experiences of her son are good. Additionally, she shared that since elementary school, her son has been assigned mentors and people who have taken a particular interest in him. Although Lance now attends high school, one of his elementary teachers and a SLP from elementary school continue to be part of his life. The input of these mentors or significant others is among the reasons Lance has had positive school experiences. As highlighted in Berger and Luckman's (1967) classic study, *The Social Construction of Reality*, the significant other is a person who has a positive influence over the attitudes and beliefs of individuals (see also Manns, 1981). Cheng and Starks (2002) asserted that significant others are "social agents" who influence children's development "through personal interaction with them" (p. 308).

**Impact of Significant Others.** Ms. Jones reported that Lance had several meaningful relationships with educators in elementary school that continue even now that he is in high school. The theme of the role of the significant other stands out here because Ms. Jones attributed the fact that Lance has never been suspended or expelled from school to an African American elementary teacher who became a mentor for Lance. Ms. Jones reported that this teacher instructed his peers that if Lance “gets to acting up, please don’t call his mom. Send him to me.” Ms. Jones said she has never received a call from school saying that Lance has misbehaved. Even in high school, Lance remains in contact with this “mentor-teacher,” as his mother called him. Significant others can influence students’ educational expectations (Cheng & Starks, 2002). Ms. Jones stated that she still receives calls from his mentor-teacher from elementary school and from his speech pathologist, asking to spend time with Lance.

Furthermore, Ms. Jones mentioned that recently, Lance was honored at church, and one of his therapists came to the ceremony. Multiple educators and adults from elementary school have taken an interest in Lance and have maintained relationships with him and his mother, even now that he is in high school. These individuals are significant others in that they have been important in Lance’s educational experiences.

**Educators’ Asset-Based Perspectives.** In the teacher survey completed by Lance’s former SLP, Ms. Jess, positive and strength-based or asset-based language, which focused on Lance’s talents and skills, was used to characterize him during the time she worked with him in an educational context. When asked, “What are three words you would use to describe the youth?” Ms. Jess used the adjectives “thoughtful, curious, and talented” to describe Lance. Furthermore, Ms. Jess indicated that his greatest challenge was “hesitation to advocate for himself with people he doesn’t know,” but noted that he has made “significant progress with

communication skills both in the classroom and [in] the community.” When asked, on the Teacher/Service-Provider Questionnaire, “What has been the most rewarding aspect of working with the student?” Ms. Jess responded, “Getting to know his personality and seeing him grow in many ways.” When asked, “What are some things you would want a future teacher (or professional) to know about the student?” Ms. Jess responded, “Take time and get to know him on his terms. He is talented, interesting, and funny, but he needs to trust you before opening up.” Ms. Jess even mentioned that Lance has a “powerful singing voice.” I asked Lance about music and singing during one of our interviews, and he sang for me. Ms. Jess’s responses illustrate positive strength- and asset-based perspectives. Youth can develop in response to positive and affirmative feedback from supportive adults.

### ***Case Study 3: Quan Miller***

Quan received his autism diagnosis when he was 24 months old. He is 15 years old and loves riding his bike, swimming, and bowling. He loves stuffed animals and takes his favorite gray wolf with him wherever he goes. Quan has significant expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language delays. He is polite and likes to smile. Ms. Miller, his mother, indicated that he was nonverbal when he first started school, but that his language has emerged slowly over time. Ms. Miller has tried to advocate for her son and learned that ABA and therapy were evidence-based approaches for supporting him. Since she was frustrated that her insurance at the time did not cover the cost of ABA, she decided to pay for it herself. Her goal was to provide the best possible support for her son, especially in the context of several other challenging life events that occurred at the time. Ms. Miller was confused when school started because she learned that the school administration would not allow Quan’s ABA professionals to work with him at the school. Quan had an autism diagnosis, and ABA was recommended in all of the literature Ms.

Miller read and all of the information she obtained. Ms. Miller decided to consult a lawyer and advocate for her son. She successfully sued the school district in order to ensure that her son's ABA team would be allowed access to his school. However, it not only cost money but also consumed time during which her child should have been receiving important interventions and support. When Ms. Miller was suing the school in court, Quan experienced several adverse childhood experiences. His father died when he was 6 after two bone marrow transplants and a 10-year battle with leukemia. Quan's aunt, who was a special-education teacher in his school district, stepped in after his father's passing and became a source of support and consolation. However, she also passed away. At times, Ms. Miller was overwhelmed by supporting Quan while maintaining her job as a business executive.

Quan is the youngest of three siblings, but his older brother and sister both live away from home, having graduated from college. While Ms. Miller reports no co-occurring disabilities, "Autism and Intellectually Disabled Mild" are listed on Quan's most recent IEP. Ms. Miller felt that she had spent an exorbitant amount of time fighting with the school, during which the school should have been helping her to support her son.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person school was canceled, Quan struggled significantly with virtual learning. The school sent a stack of worksheets for him to work on. Every day, he was expected to sit in front of the screen and work on this stack of worksheets. His mother also struggled to support him during this time, along with managing her job. The local news station filmed a report on her and Quan, documenting some of the challenges they both faced during virtual schooling.

Quan enjoys routine and likes to ride his bike daily. Ms. Miller usually rides with him, but due to her work schedule, this is exceedingly difficult. On several occasions, using a brightly

colored vest, Ms. Miller allowed Quan to ride his bike around their neighborhood while she worked. Normally, Quan stays in his neighborhood; his neighbors know him and that he has an autism diagnosis. Ms. Miller stated that her neighbors text her every time Quan rides his bike near their houses. However, Ms. Miller indicated that Quan has roamed outside of their neighborhood “at least five times,” and that she resorted to calling the police to help find him. The last time Quan wandered off on his bike and Ms. Miller called the police for help, the police reported her to Child Protective Services, which started a yearlong investigation. Ms. Miller was interviewed, her house was inspected, and she was compelled to provide letters of support from her pastor and others, proving she was not a danger to her son. Ms. Miller stated that this process was extremely unpleasant. She wonders why the police did not offer to help her and point her in the direction of any programs that would help her to support her son rather than calling Child Protective Services.

Ms. Miller indicated that she was exhausted but that she continued to advocate and fight for her son. She continues to have difficulties in managing her high-stress job as a business executive. Despite being a high-income earner, she explained that it was still difficult to manage all of the costs associated with supporting her child. Ms. Miller’s goal for Quan’s future is for him to become independent, and she would enjoy it if he learned how to tell her about his school day when he came home from school. I interviewed Quan twice for a total of 120 minutes.

**Research Question 1: How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?**

Highlighting the students’ perspectives was a major goal for this project, and I began this research aware of the difficulties inherent in capturing the voices of autistic youth, given the communication differences sometimes associated with autism. Two themes that emerged from

the data were the youth agency and their pursuit of affirmation. Quan was polite when we met and brought his book bag, which had several stuffed animals; his favorite was a gray wolf whose name was “Gray Wolf.” During our initial meeting, I was surprised by his response when I pulled out my notebook and question set. Quan looked very nervous and said, “No.” Ms. Miller intervened and whispered to me that he did not like to work in the summer. She mentioned that he did not even like the words “work” or “school.” Ms. Miller commented that when she had attempted to take him shopping for school shoes, the words “school shoes” had really upset him. Ms. Miller indicated that virtual school was “especially difficult” because sitting in front of the screen and completing worksheets was difficult for Quan. In fact, balancing work and supporting Quan was difficult. It appeared that Quan had learned to reject the banking model of education (Freire, 1970/2007), and my attempt to get him to complete yet more worksheets (surveys) reminded him of school during COVID-19. I interpreted this exchange as Quan speaking up for himself and showing agency.

*Case Study 3: Quan Miller—RQ1: How do Black autistic youth describe their everyday lived educational experiences from their own perspectives?*

I was more successful in accessing opinions from Lance and Tasha about their educational experiences than with Quan. But, my definition of youth voice for this study was broad and included youth behavior as well as perspective. To this end, I took a broader perspective on youth voice with Quan.

**Youth Agency.** We must listen to what youth tell us about their autonomy. I define youth agency as youth-initiated behavior representing self-determination and choice to engage or participate in an activity or event. Unlike my interviews with Tasha and Lance, Quan used less verbal language. In fact, “His vocabulary and pragmatic language skills were reported to be

below the first percentile.” Every time I interviewed Quan, he was polite and well-mannered and made eye contact when he shook my hand. Quan presented as kind and gentle. However, Quan reacted strongly when I attempted to ask the interview questions and said “No” when I pulled out a hard copy of my question set. Ms. Miller inserted that Quan associated paper with school, and he did not like doing schoolwork or even talking about school, especially during the summer. Ms. Miller implied that we had to ask Quan questions casually and not let him see the paper with the written questions. When I asked Quan how he felt about school, he replied, “Happy.” I interpreted this to mean that he enjoyed some parts of school. But Quan’s reaction to the paper in my hand stayed with me. I decided to revisit the data I collected for his entire case record. When I read his IEP closely, it became clear that his reaction to my paper was partly influenced by the “worksheets” and “data sheets” relied upon during COVID-19. Quan’s mother had been vocal about her dissatisfaction with virtual school because it was difficult for her son to sit in front of a screen all day. Additionally, Ms. Miller said the school had sent Quan a literal stack of worksheets to work on. It seems that the expectation for Quan during virtual school was to sit in front of the screen and work on the pile of worksheets sent home for him to complete. I believe this period left a lasting negative impression on Quan. When he saw my question set, he immediately associated it with that period of virtual school, and he rejected answering the survey instruments. His “No” was not an act of defiance, but it shows him speaking up for himself. Furthermore, his teacher documented in his IEP that “If he needs help from one of the teachers, he will ask, and he also likes his space to sit by himself and do his work or have his breaks/downtimes.” Additionally, it stated, “If he feels that you are in his space too long, he will say (‘Move Please’).” Importantly, the IEP also documented, “When he is overwhelmed, not having a good day, we will give him the option of going in the other room to have time to

himself and sometimes he will go in there and other times he will refuse.” Moreover, “When or if he needs a break while reading, he will say ‘break please or I’m finished reading.’” These choices and behaviors that Quan displayed in his educational environment showcase agency on his part. His refusal to answer my questionnaire further shows agency.

**Seeking Affirmation.** I define seeking affirmation as a youth taking active steps to engage with educators and peers in ways that affirm the youth. Because Quan resisted completing my written surveys and questionnaires, I focused on analyzing documents such as his IEP. I include this theme under student voice, given that it highlights how Quan attempts to connect and communicate with others in his educational environment. After reviewing the interview transcripts and Quan’s IEP, I noticed several behaviors demonstrating Quan tried to make connections and seek affirmation. For example, from his IEP, an educator wrote, “He loves going to the board writing math problems and working with his teachers,” and Quan “likes to have his work checked. He likes to receive high fives when he completes math problems.” The IEP continued, “He will go up to the front of the class and read the book to his peers and teachers sometimes also if it is a book that he enjoyed reading.” The IEP also noted, “He likes to hug people.” The IEP also pointed out that Quan enjoys saying hello to people. For example, “He said hello to the teacher assistant and the observer” shows that Quan will speak out in class and say hello to peers, teachers, and even strangers, as the observer referenced in the IEP suggested.

### **Research Question 2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?**

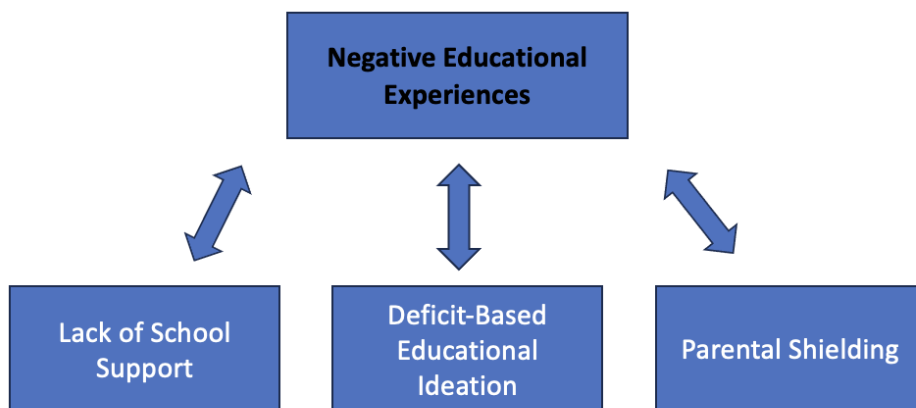
Research Question 2 was informed by interview data and questionnaire responses from Ms. Miller. To reiterate, the parental data from the interviews, Parent Pre-Interview Survey (see

Appendix D), Parent Demographic Survey (see Appendix E), and Parent Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (see Appendix F) were used to answer FQ2 (see Figure 5).

Ms. Miller provided informative background knowledge about her experiences supporting Quan’s schooling and some of the challenges she faced. To align with the RQs, I organized the themes under negative school experiences, including a lack of school support, deficit-based educational ideas, and negative parental shielding.

Figure 9

*Case Study 3: Quan Miller—RQ2: What are the everyday lived educational experiences of Black autistic youth?*



**Lack of School Support.** Ms. Miller reported that Quan was nonverbal or preverbal when he first began school. He did not speak. Quan’s home situation was stressful in that his father was at the end of a 10-year battle with leukemia. Although Quan’s mother, Ms. Miller, knew little about autism, she researched it as thoroughly as she could. As a result, she discovered that ABA was the recommended evidence-based approach for supporting autistic youth. However, her insurance at the time did not cover the cost of ABA. She was surprised not only by the cost of ABA but also by the number of hours that were recommended per week. Although Ms. Miller was a high-income earner, she found the ABA costs substantial. Nevertheless, it was important to her to address her son’s needs as effectively as she could, and she paid for the ABA

therapy privately. When Quan started school, Ms. Miller felt that she had advocated for him as firmly as she could to prepare him. However, Quan's school would not allow ABA staff to be present. Having determined that she had taken the optimal approach to supporting her son, Ms. Miller was somewhat perplexed by this confrontation with the school. After advocating for Quan through the school's appeal processes, Ms. Miller decided to pursue due process with the school district, and after a long battle, she was successful.

Ms. Miller felt that she was not listened to by professionals and that, sometimes, it was a battle to obtain the right support for Quan. When Quan started exhibiting behavioral challenges in school, Ms. Miller would be inundated with calls from the school, during which the school would put Quan on the phone with her to help him regulate himself. When this did not work, they would ask her to come to pick him up. This was the school's main mode of supporting Quan. In response to this, Ms. Miller felt compelled to formally ask for a behavioral intervention plan, and she wondered why the school itself had not done this. Ms. Miller described Quan's behavior as improved once he had specific behavioral support in place.

In another instance, an autistic classmate hit Quan, but both the teacher and teacher's aide were out of the classroom when the event occurred. Quan's mother was not upset that the child had hit Quan; rather, she was upset that the educators were not in the classroom as they should have been. She felt that securing appropriate support from the school was difficult from the time Quan started school; she eventually sued the school so that his ABA therapist could work with him in the classroom. However, Ms. Miller indicated that overall, the support from the school "each year has gotten better," although "it was not easy advocating" for Quan.

**Parental Shielding.** As previously noted, parental shielding can lead to negative or positive consequences. In this negative instance, parental shielding contributed to Quan's return

to a self-contained classroom, at his mother's request, in middle school. Quan had been assigned to a self-contained classroom throughout elementary school. However, during middle school, the choice was made to integrate him into the general-education classroom in sixth grade. Quan's behavior deteriorated at this point, and Ms. Miller indicated that sixth grade was a remarkably difficult year. From interviewing Ms. Miller, I gathered that the inclusive classroom was an over-stimulating environment for Quan. Ms. Miller reported that during this time, Quan even hit a teacher. However, Quan was not suspended for the incident. As noted during this time, the school personnel continued to call Ms. Miller often for her to speak with Quan over the phone to help support him when he was having a difficult experience. Ms. Miller reported asking for a behavior assessment and a behavioral intervention plan during this time. She decided to move Quan back into the self-contained classroom because it featured "less noise and stimulation." For Ms. Miller, moving Quan back into the self-contained classroom was a way of protecting him from becoming overwhelmed in the general-education classroom and of managing his behavior. However, it was also prohibitive in that it kept him from learning alongside his typically developing peers. Another option might have been for the school staff and special-education team to develop a robust strategy to incorporate and support Quan's needs in the general educational space. Behavior is often the determining factor in classroom inclusion, but it should not be a litmus test. Rather, a child's individual learning potential should govern their access to the general-education-classroom space, with educators leaning towards inclusion. I characterize parental shielding here as a negative school experience based on a macro view of educational placements of youth with disabilities. Youth with disabilities have worse educational outcomes when educated in segregated classrooms (Kurth, 2015). While Ms. Miller's intent was to support her son as well as she could, placing him back in a self-contained classroom in the sixth grade

had ramifications that persist in the present day; now in the 10th grade, he remains in a 100% self-contained educational setting.

**Deficit-Based Educational Ideas.** I received a copy of Quan’s 38-page IEP, which I read, reread, and coded based on the asset-based language and deficit-based language it contained. The IEP was difficult to read because it was almost entirely based on Quan’s deficits and tasks that he could not perform. For example, “very poor” or “very low” was written over 32 times in his IEP, and “extremely low” was written at least 65 times. This deficit language appeared over 100 times in total. Interestingly, Quan’s teachers were also aware that he could not tie his shoes, which is fairly common amongst autistic youth, but they included this in his IEP, writing that “when he was done with the assignment, the teacher assistant tied his shoelaces for him.” The utility of including this detail in Quan’s IEP is questionable as it does not add value to the overall IEP or contribute anything positive towards Quan’s development, except to point out yet another challenge that he has. Negative descriptions of Quan permeate his IEP, while asset-based language only appears a handful of times. For example, “He has a beautiful handwriting” and “He is polite and will apologize if and when he makes a mistake by saying ‘Im [*sic*] sorry’ or Excuse Me.” Every child has value. Even if a child is experiencing difficulties in school, it is incumbent upon teachers to treat that child with dignity in a way that honors their humanity and confers expectations upon them. Deficit-based language leads to deficit-based ideas and a lack of expectation, which contributes to negative school experiences and a negative educational environment.

Above, I described my findings associated with three separate case studies. In this next section, I engage in a cross-case analysis, examining the relationships between the cases.

### *Cross-Case Analysis*

An advantage of multiple case study design is cross-case analysis that considers the larger implications of the research project. The cross-case analysis provides an opportunity to discuss more extensive considerations related to the experiences of Black autistic youth and their families, not necessarily bound one individual case study or to the research questions but to the larger research study. Some of the experiences and findings in this study are specific to one case study, while other experiences were shared. In this section, I discuss and contrast some of the themes that emerged, such as positive educational experiences, early autism diagnosis, segregated education, limited academic growth, challenges supporting child and balancing work, lack of transition planning, absence of autism disclosure, parental shielding, and racial and cultural implications.

**Positive Educational Experiences.** No published research reports on the quality of Black autistic youth relationships with their teachers or school from the youth perspective. Tasha and Lance reported positive student-teacher relationships via the My Teacher and Me Questionnaire in this study. They both reported liking their teacher and believing that their teacher liked them. Tasha and Lance also reported feeling that their teacher cared about them, and they cared about their teacher. Positive student-teacher relationships are critical for student engagement (Losh, Eisenhower, & Blacher, 2022). Quan did not directly answer questions about his teacher on the My Teacher and Me Questionnaire, but when asked about school, he said, “Happy” and drew a smiley face. While more information is needed regarding Quan’s feelings toward his teachers, I interpret his smiley face regarding the school to some degree as a positive educational experience. Based on this data, a theme of positive educational experiences emerged across the cases to varying degrees.

**Early Autism Diagnosis.** The youth in this study all received an autism diagnosis by the time they were 3 years of age. This early diagnosis was important because, theoretically, it allowed for the start of interventions and support early, especially when Tasha, Quan, and Lance started school. However, even when Black youth receive early diagnosis, they often do not receive “more than a modicum of developmental therapy” (Constantino et al., 2023, p. 950). Additionally, contemporary studies suggest that Black families experience more obstacles than White families accessing school-based services (Koffer Miller et al., 2023). Ms. Jones stated, “It took me about a year” to get any services for Lance after his diagnosis; this was valuable intervention time lost. Ms. Wilson indicated that it took “three to six months” after diagnosis for Tasha to access services. However, Ms. Miller noted that Quan began speech therapy and occupational therapy shortly after diagnosis, but it took over a year before he started ABA services. While an early autism diagnosis is critical, obtaining services, supports, and interventions are equally as critical.

**Segregated Education.** Negative educational experiences were also reported. Placement decisions during elementary school often have detrimental consequences in the long term because once youth are placed in self-contained classrooms, they seldom have opportunities for inclusive educational opportunities in the future (Kurth, 2015). Historically, minoritized youth with disabilities have been educated in self-contained classrooms, and Black autistic youth are more likely than their white peers to be educated in self-contained classrooms (Bateman & Wilson, 2021). Evidence suggests that the inclusive or general education classroom should be the default educational setting for autistic youth because of more access to the curriculum, access to peers, and the opportunity for peer support and modeling that can have long-term benefits for autistic youth (Kozleski, 2020; Locke et al., 2012). Witnessing, observing, and participating in

inclusive classrooms can provide essential opportunities for autistic kids to experience complex social interactions and normative classroom behaviors (Taylor & DeQuinzio, 2012).

In one study, Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) reported that autistic youth in general education classrooms academically outperform autistic youth in special education classrooms in “math and language arts.” Across each case study, Tasha, Quan, and Lance have received most of their education in self-contained classrooms. Each youth spent their elementary education in self-contained classrooms from first through fifth grade. Tasha and Quan spent 100% of their middle school in the self-contained classroom and are on pace to experience the same in high school. However, Ms. Jones indicated that Lance spends 50% of his high school day in the general education classroom. Interestingly, during sixth grade, Quan spent some time in the general education classroom, and during this period, his behavior escalated, resulting in outbursts. Ms. Miller stated that “sixth grade was the worst” and his most challenging year. Ms. Miller was often called whenever Quan was having difficulty, sometimes daily. In response to the school’s constant phone calls, Ms. Miller decided it was better for Quan to move back into the self-contained classroom. Self-contained classrooms are often better for educators but not students. Dunn (1968) suggested that the main reason for moving disabled youth into segregated settings was to make it easier on general education educators and typically developing students and not for the benefit of disabled youth.

**Limited Academic Growth.** The youth in this study were all high school students that have experienced limited academic gains. It was reported that Quan was at a “kindergarten reading level” and a “first grade level in math.” Ms. Miller stated, “I think they are just passing him,” and he “never has homework,” and there was “only one year” in middle school that she was happy with his education. Lance’s math and reading levels were also significantly below

grade level. However, Ms. Jones said that she has been “happy” with Lance’s educational progress over time. I pressed Ms. Jones on this and asked if the school should be doing more to help Lance reach his potential, and she responded, “No, I have to be a better mother.” Here, Ms. Jones was not assigning responsibility to the school for Lance’s limited academic growth but assuming the responsibility to herself. Similarly, when asked if the school should do more for Tasha, Ms. Wilson also took responsibility and responded, “I have learned to be an advocate for my child, and I still have more things to learn.” Tasha was reported to have a “functional reading level” and a “third-grade math level.” Ms. Wilson continued, “It should be free for parents and caregivers to go to school for special education, autism, or special needs conferences,” which suggests she felt responsible for Tasha’s educational progress. In order for Tasha to receive a high-quality education, Ms. Wilson should not have to do it herself by pursuing a degree in special education. I suggest in each case that schools are responsible for providing high-quality educational experiences for all students, especially students with disabilities, in partnership with parents. Individualized, intensive, and asset-based supports, interventions, and services effectively improve autistic youth skills, and a free and appropriate education is the right of every student. Academic growth is possible when educators build upon student assets, strengths, and interests.

**Challenges Supporting Child and Balancing Work.** Each mother had to balance her full-time job while attempting to support their child during virtual learning. The COVID-19 pandemic created significant educational challenges for Tasha, Quan, and Lance. Ms. Wilson, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Jones all reported that virtual school during the pandemic was difficult. For example, Ms. Wilson reported that “it was extremely stressful” trying to work virtually and support Tasha simultaneously. Ms. Miller also stated that she had “a lot of difficulty balancing

everything,” especially her job as an executive and supporting Quan. Furthermore, Ms. Miller stated, “I am highly compensated, and I still struggle with support.” Ms. Miller stated that she has “reached out to my family and even Facebook” for help without success. Challenges supporting their children and maintaining employment existed before the pandemic, during the pandemic, and presently.

**Lack of Transition Planning.** Transition planning is exceedingly important for youth with individual education programs, especially youth with autism diagnosis. I asked each parent if the school had engaged in any conversation about transition planning, and Ms. Jones, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Wilson asserted that no transition planning discussions had taken place at any time with school officials. In Tasha’s and Quan’s IEPs, there was no discussion of transition planning, and in speaking with Ms. Jones, there was no discussion of transition planning in Lance’s IEP. Transition planning is important for students, especially autistic students, who often struggle after high school with poor job prospects and limited access to services, social opportunities, and educational opportunities (Roux et al., 2023). According to the Drexel Autism Institute – Life Course Outcomes Research Program, autistic individuals have the lowest rate of employment across all disability groups at 58% employment (Roux et al., 2015). However, the employment rate for autistic youth who worked in high school was 90% as opposed to 40% for those who did not work during high school. Additionally, the vast majority of autistic individuals who were employed (90%) were highly verbal, and only a small fraction of individuals with lower conversation skills were employed at 15% (Roux et al., 2015). Given the verbal fluency of each student in this study, it is increasingly important that transition planning be prioritized so that these youth have access, exposure, and opportunity to pursue support, and employment after high school. Rates of unemployment for autistic individuals are higher than other disability

categories, and unemployment can have a detrimental impact on mental health (see Hedley et al., 2017). The transition period after high school can be a precursor to mental health challenges for autistic youth (Krumpelman & Hord, 2021). Roux et al. (2023) noted, “The transition services ecosystem is disjointed, poorly integrated, and fails to consistently reach marginalized subgroups” (p. 492). Given this fact, an increased focus on transition planning is essential for Black autistic youth, and this planning should begin as early as possible, preferably ninth grade. It is disappointing that no transition planning or discussions have occurred with any of the families.

**Absence of Autism Disclosure.** Some research suggests that discussing autism and diagnosis status with an autistic child can be empowering (Oredipe et al., 2023). Autism impacts almost every educational experience Quan, Tasha, and Lance navigate. However, none of the three parents explicitly discussed autism with their children in this study. Autism disclosure decisions are complex (Riccio et al., 2021), and the best timing of disclosure is child-specific, where parents should use their best judgment before engaging in this discussion (Oredipe et al., 2023). More work is needed to understand how and when Black families with autistic youth engage in disclosure with their children.

**Parental Shielding.** Shielding was present in the home life and educational life of each youth in this study. In each case study, the mothers were advocates for their children and shielded them in hopes of protecting them. Ms. Miller asserted that for Quan, “The difference maker was me being his advocacy,” noting how she was actively involved with Quan’s education because “teachers, staff, and administrators are more hands-on when the parents are involved.” Similarly, Ms. Jones stated, “That’s why we as parents are advocates for our children.” Parental shielding is necessary to protect Black autistic youth. However, parents must

be cognizant when shielding becomes prohibitive. For example, when Ms. Wilson decided that Tasha should not attend her ninth grade orientation and pep rally this was in an attempt to shield her from the noise of that environment. This decision was informed by Ms. Wilson's knowledge as a mother that the environmental stimulation may have been too much for Tasha. However, it also prevented Tasha from participating in a school function with her peers. Similarly, when Ms. Miller decided that Quan should not remain in the general education classroom, she moved him back to protect him. These parental decisions were taken to protect their children. Yet, it would be shortsighted as a researcher to fault the parents of Black autistic youth for being overprotective. Educational environments for Black youth with disabilities can be lined with landmines, and parents must err on the side of caution when it comes to supporting their children. Ms. Miller's decision to move Quan back to the self-contained classroom was both protective and prohibitive.

**Racial and Cultural Implications.** Parents' perspectives about the role that race played in their child's educational experiences were not straightforward. Ms. Jones, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Wilson reported complex racial experiences supporting their children. Ms. Jones reported that race played "a big part" in Lance's educational experiences. For example, Ms. Jones stated, "I feel that more white students get better service than our babies. Better therapy, better education, and it's not fair." Yet, Ms. Jones believed that Lance had had white teachers who were "excellent." Similarly, Ms. Wilson noted that Tasha's "sixth- and seventh-grade teacher was excellent, and she was white." Furthermore, Ms. Miller stated, "I know race played a role, but the sad part is his white teachers were more hands-on than the black teachers." Ms. Miller believed that race played a role with school administrators when Quan's aba professionals were not allowed in his school. Notably, each mother shared positive perceptions of teachers across

the color line. While each mother reported positive experiences working with white educators, they reported negative experiences working with support professionals. For example, on the Autism Family Experience Questionnaire, Ms. Jones, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Wilson all reported that they only felt listened to by professionals “sometimes.” This fact aligns with other research suggesting that professionals sometimes ignore Black parents (Dababnah et al., 2018). The autism apparatus of support professionals, educators, ABA practitioners, and medical professionals are predominantly white, and there is a need for training on cultural competence to improve relationships between parents and service professionals (Dababnah et al., 2018). Steinbrenner et al. (2022) stated, “In attempts to explain or ameliorate disparities, researchers, policymakers, and other leaders often focus on the impact of race rather than the impact of systemic racism” (p. 12). Structural and systemic racial challenges contributed to the educational experiences of the youth in this study that are historical in origin that I draw a straight line into history to acknowledge.

## **Conclusion**

Black autistic youth are privy to complex negative and positive educational experiences. Black autistic youth are not a monolith for this reason, themes were reported by case study participants and research questions. Tasha’s experiences with positive community-based relationships were counter to her experiences with the disability hierarchy experienced within her classroom. Lance’s experiences with educators’ asset-based perspectives were the opposite of Quan’s experiences with deficit-based educational ideation. In each case, unique educational experiences were identified. However, the youth in this study shared experiences of early autism diagnoses, predominantly being educated in segregated classrooms, limited academic growth, and being raised by single mothers who balanced work obligations while supporting the autistic

child. Black autistic youth deserve access to equitable educational opportunities delivered by professional educators skilled at identifying and utilizing youth skills and talents to teach them.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Historically, autism research included highly verbal, academically astute white and male participants (Bennett & Goodall, 2022; Diemer et al., 2022; Happé & Frith, 2020; Stedman et al., 2019). This study included three Black autistic youth with speech and language delays and varying degrees of verbal language usage. This study is significant because it elicited first-person insight from Black autistic youth, something that has not been done in published autistic literature to my knowledge to date. The goal of this study was to explore the educational experiences of Black autistic youth and to gain insight into first-person feedback about their experiences. I utilized a multiple case study design, which allowed me to take a deep dive into the educational experiences of three youth. I developed an interview protocol that leaned on the experiences of researchers who have pursued soliciting the perspectives of autistic youth in the past, and I used interview instruments designed specifically for autistic youth (Clark & Adams, 2020; Losh, Eisenhower, & Blacher, 2022). I engaged in Pre-Interview Surveys with parents in order to plan individualized interviews catered to each youth's strength. I further collected data from parents and pursued feedback from educators or service providers who had previously taught the youth in order to inform my case studies. I created individual case study narratives highlighting some of the educational experiences of each youth and conducted a cross-case analysis to identify themes larger than each case. In this chapter, I revisit my conceptual framework and engage in discussion regarding the implications that emerged out of this study, and I discuss how my conceptual framework contributed to this study. This study showed that Black autistic youth could be active participants in research shedding light on their educational experiences.

## **Positionality Revisited**

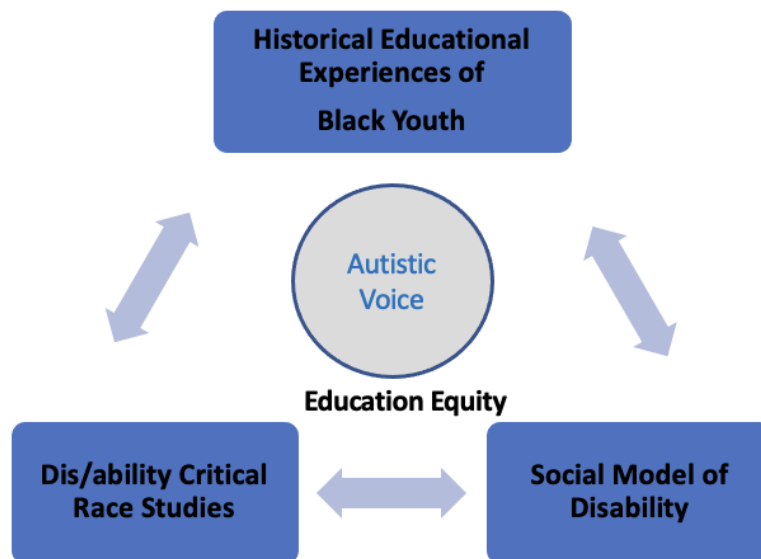
After completing this study, it is essential that I own my perspective and lived experiences as the father of an autistic youth. Patton (2015) asserted that researcher positionality or reflexivity demands “emphasizing the importance of deep introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (p. 70). During this project, meeting with Quan, Tasha, and Lance, I was oftentimes reminded of my own son. Reading the IEPs of some of the participants in this study, as well as speaking with the parents in this study reminded me of my own experience as a parent navigating my own child’s IEP as well as fighting against placing my son in a self-contained classroom as was recommended. The reason I am adamant that the youth in this study have not received an equitable education is that my son’s assessments and autism presentation were very similar to the youth in this study, including expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language delays. Further, my son’s assessment listed ADHD and developmental delay. My son’s assessment was similar to Quan’s IEP, which contained over 100 deficit-based comments. But one key difference with my child is that I refused the recommendation to put him in a self-contained classroom. My child has made substantial academic progress year over year that the teachers and administrators from his first assessment did not and could not believe was feasible. I do not believe they had a mental model that would allow them to see my child’s current academic progress as possible. Similarly, I believe the educators who first assigned Tasha, Quan, and Lance to self-contained classrooms could not imagine successful educational futures for them. My own child’s assessment was focused on deficits, the things that he could not do, and they did not focus on any of his assets. I am biased towards the belief that Tasha, Quan, and Lance have thus far not received an equitable education. I am biased towards believing in the potential of Black autistic youth, and I believe

every autistic child has strengths that can be leveraged to support their educational journey. Black autistic youth deserve access to high-quality individualized learning that builds on their strengths, assets, and student interest that is delivered in the inclusive classroom. I believe that the schools have deprived the youth in this study of an equity education designed to help them develop into whatever potential they have.

### **Revisiting My Conceptual Framework**

My conceptual framework (see Figure 10) positioned autistic voices within the well-documented historical educational experiences of Black youth, within a Dis/ability Critical Race Studies framework in dialogue with the Social Model of Disability. One takeaway from this study is that while the youth experienced some historically based educational challenges, they did not experience others. For example, the youth did not experience delays in their autism diagnosis, which is common for Black autistic youth. However, the youth were relegated to self-contained classrooms, a practice that has a long history of disproportionately impacting Black youth with disabilities.

Figure 10  
*Conceptual Framework*



Importantly, I conceptualized this model with Educational Equity at the center. In this project, I expanded Ladson-Billings's (2006) articulation of education debt, and I presented a new definition of educational equity that argues for a value-added capabilities-building approach (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2014; Walker, 2012). The youth in this study had experienced limited academic growth over the course of their schooling; additionally, no transition discussion or preparation has occurred that could potentially begin the process of preparing this youth for opportunities after they leave school. When we think about the value of an education, when we think about education as a financial tool, an asset class, this changes how we measure educational equity. I am asking what is the value of the education that Black autistic youth leave school with and how do we build equity in that education. I have argued that educational equity must begin with expectation and the hope that over time, youth, autistic and non-autistic, will accrue tangible educational value that substantiates the educational investment of high-quality, evidenced-based, asset-bound instruction specifically curated to meet the

specific learning needs of students. It appears that the youth in this study were assigned to self-contained classrooms that were not equipped to support, teach, and challenge these students. It seems to me, the educational experiences of Black autistic youth in this study, as suggested in the data, are primarily an experience of educational isolation, limited academic progress, and non-equity building.

### **Historical Educational Experiences of Black Youth.**

Problems with self-contained classrooms and underrepresented youth have been documented for decades. We were cautioned about the risk of segregated classrooms over a half-century ago, and it seems the advice remains relevant:

Regular teachers and administrators have sincerely felt they were doing these pupils a favor by removing them from the pressures of an unrealistic and inappropriate program of studies. Special educators have also fully believed that the children involved would make greater progress in special schools and classes. However, the overwhelming evidence is that our present and past practices have their major justification in removing pressures on regular teachers and pupils, at the expense of the socioculturally deprived slow learning pupils themselves (Dunn, 1968, p. 6)

Despite laws prohibiting the segregation of students with disabilities, ethnic and racial underrepresented students are often subjected to racially segregated learning environments (Artiles & Trent, 2010; Dunn, 1968; Ford & Russo, 2016; Graves & Ye, 2017; White et al., 2019; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002) with less high-quality instruction (Kauffman, 1993; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998; Waitoller et al., 2010). White et al. (2019) found that “Black students with autism, ED [emotional disturbances], and ID [intellectual disabilities] were more likely to be taught in low inclusion environments than their peers with the same disability labels” (p. 464). The youth in this study, while relegated to self-contained educational settings, have not experienced educational gains. Historically, special education and self-contained spaces have been promoted as beneficial for student’s learning; however, evidence suggests Black students are not getting access to equitable academic instruction (Graves & Ye, 2017). Furthermore,

Kurth (2015) reminded us, as first conceptualized by Donnellan (1984) and expounded upon by Jorgenson (2005), of the importance of considering the “least dangerous assumptions” (p. 254), suggesting it is most often least harmful to place autistic students into inclusive classrooms for a number of reasons.

The segregated educational spaces in this study have not yielded educational dividends for these students. The educational environment has not delivered on the promise of a high-quality educational experience in the context of the least restrictive environment. When these youth entered school, their autism diagnosis, communication differences, and challenges were enough to relegate them away from the general educational classroom. Dunn (1968) suggested that the main reason for moving youth into segregated settings was to make it easier on general education educators as well as typically developing students and not for the benefit of disabled youth. I posit that these students were not expected to do well when they entered school because of their autism and the school’s response to their conditions. When autistic youth are not expected to do well in school, this expectation itself becomes disadvantageous (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). A major implication is that the placement practice of assigned Black autistic youth to segregated learning spaces must be put to an end. Black autistic youth deserve individualized educational opportunities that leverage their unique skills, interests and abilities delivered with an intensity and purpose to help students reach their potential.

It was my intention to represent Black autistic youth in this study through privileging the voices of Black autistic youth. “Voice” was conceived or broadly to encompass not only verbal speaking, but also youth behaviors and attitudes. Each youth was uniquely different, making case study methods an important approach for capturing the nuances of each individual case study. A multiple case study approach was important for discussing the cases in the context of one

another. Some contemporary data suggest that autistic youth are spending more time in the general education classroom (Bateman & Wilson, 2021). But that was not the case with study participants; each youth has spent the majority of their educational career in self-contained classrooms. The lack of access to the inclusive classroom is indicative of a historical placement of marginalized students into self-contained classrooms (White et al., 2019). Despite increases in inclusion, Black youth with disabilities are most likely to be educated in segregated classrooms (Bateman & Wilson, 2021; White et al., 2019). There is a history of racial segregation in exclusionary classrooms for students of color with and without disabilities (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Black students with disabilities are more likely to be segregated than their white counterparts with the same disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013).

Youth in this study have lost access to typical developing peers, practice social opportunities and learning opportunities in the general education classroom. Blacher and Eisenhower (2023), although discussing school suspensions, argued that removing kids from “linguistically and socially enriched” classrooms may have pernicious long-term effects and it seems that segregated self-contained classrooms may hinder Black autistic youth as much as suspensions. Special education, once synonymous with segregated education, has been a problem, Proffitt (2022) contended since the beginning of special education as a field. As Kurth (2015) pointed out, since placement decisions often have a long-term impact, the discussion around these decisions should focus on developing ways to meaningfully include autistic youth in the general education classroom. In this study, three Black autistic youth were placed in self-contained classrooms in elementary school, and now they are in high school with limited, almost non-evident academic gain. Autism was the identity marker the educational system used to segregate these students when they were six and seven. Challenges with expressive, receptive,

and pragmatic language made placing these youth in these settings the preferred route for the school system. It is not equitable to place autistic students with language delays in segregated special education classrooms with minimal speech-language intervention and other support, as illustrated in this study.

Segregated learning environments for autistic youth are dangerous because the assumptions based on their intellect and ability are often flawed (Jorgenson, 2005). Being nonverbal, preverbal, or having language delays does not mean that an individual has an intellectual disability or that a student cannot achieve. Importantly, having autism, what some deem severe or needing high levels of support, should not automatically relegate a child to a self-contained classroom.

### **Dis/ability Critical Race Studies**

I decided on a DisCrit theoretical framework for this study because DisCrit troubles any easy discussions on race, disability, disability status, and identity. DisCrit Tenet 2 examines the complexity of identity and how co-existing identities interact. Youth in this study occupied numerous identity categories such as being Black or African American according to racial conventions and autistic—and in one case, female—but most importantly, they are children. In one case, Tasha is also a Black autistic female youth. Children deserve to be supported, protected, and encouraged towards reaching their potential. The literature on autistic females is sparse, and the literature on Black autistic females is practically nonexistent (Diemer et al., 2022; Lovelace et al., 2021). The fact that they are young people, children, should supersede any limitations associated with disability labels or racial stereotyping. They deserve to be treated as children with all the guarantees of a free and appropriate education.

DisCrit Tenet 3 acknowledges the social construction of race, disability, and accompanying deficit ideation by critiquing medical conceptions of limitations solely derived from identity markers. This is not to say that disability challenges do not visit autistic youth, but rather socially constructed conceptions of disability often harm autistic individuals more than actual disability attributable challenges (Oliver, 1983). The social model of disability critiques disability conceptions that assign limitations to individuals solely based on disability labels. Having an autism diagnosis should be descriptive and not prescriptive. Black autistic youth deserve every opportunity to be included in the general education classroom and not relegated to segregated learning spaces because they are autistic or because they have communication differences. Many reasons contribute to youth placement into self-contained classrooms. A child with autism and communication differences is at risk for placement partly because educators deem it more manageable to remove autistic youth from their classrooms, given the social construction of disability. An autism diagnosis, differences in communication styles and verbal language use should not be factors that contribute to youth classroom placement.

Importantly, DisCrit Tenet 4 privileges the voices of Black autistic youth (Annamma et al., 2013). A primary goal of this study was to engage Black autistic youth to gain insight into their first-person perspectives related to their educational experiences. Tenet 4 elevates the voices of marginalized individuals because these individuals are critical for telling their own stories. Because Black autistic voices are often absent in the academic literature, it is important that we honor the voices of Black families with autistic youth (Lewis et al., 2022). The voices of marginalized or minoritized students are “consistently silenced and unattended” (Kozleski, 2020, p. 351), and these voices are important because all students deserve equitable educational opportunities that consider student perspectives. Educators must learn to listen to autistic youth

voices even when autistic youth voices are conveyed through more than just words but also behaviors. Differences in communication do not mean less than. In this study, I have documented a process for pursuing the voices of autistic youth. While I had some success in accessing autistic youth voice about the perceptions of their relationships with their teachers, more work is needed in this area. More immediate work is required in this field to engage Black autistic youth in meaningful discussion about how they experience the world. As researchers pursue interviewing more autistic youth, they must reject research study architectures that negligently ignore race and ethnicity, as so much autism research does.

My belief disposition is that autistic youth are the best positioned to comment on their educational experiences. But the role that parents play in advocating for their children is essential, and this study was heavily informed by parents. I believe in the necessity of pursuing the voices of autistic youth so that their perspectives are not only included but privileged and used to inform how educators, administrators, and policymakers shape the classroom, schools, policy, and opportunities for these students. In this study, Black autistic youth provided first-person or voice insight into their relationship with their teachers. DisCrit Tenet 4 helped me gain insight into youth voice.

### **The Educational Experiences of Black Autistic Youth**

It was rewarding to meet Tasha, Lance, and Quan and spend some time interviewing them. Despite diverse communication styles, I was able to elicit first-person feedback from each youth to varying degrees. In some ways, it seems obvious to mention that I was able to interview Black autistic youth, but I list this fact because in the academic literature, I was unsuccessful identifying examples of other researchers who have interviewed Black autistic youth.

As established, the youth in this study received early autism diagnoses. This finding is contrary to previous studies that suggest delays in diagnosis (Constantino et al., 2020). But this is a welcomed finding in that it may indicate that the delay in diagnosis experienced by some Black families is beginning to shift towards earlier diagnosis. In addition, previous researchers have also found that Black autistic youth are at risk of disciplinary disparities (Artiles, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2020; Young et al., 2018). However, the findings in this work do not replicate historical literature on school discipline, which is a welcomed finding.

### **Implications for Educators**

This study has implications for how educators can recognize and learn to listen to the voices of Black autistic youth and their parents. Educators' beliefs influence how they view students of color and can impact educators' effectiveness teaching these students (Lynn et al., 2010). Educators must hold high expectations for all students, regardless of race or disability status. Gershenson et al. (2016) research suggests that "non-black teachers have significantly lower educational expectations for black students than do black teachers" (p. 222). Evidence suggests that lower teacher expectations can contribute to more discipline referrals for students, which contributes to disproportionality in school discipline for minority students (Santiago-Rosario et al., 2021). Educators must be willing to do the work of self-reflection, what Ginwright (2022) called "mirror work," where they interrogate their own biases and stereotypes (Starck et al., 2020).

In this study, the youth were not exposed to disparate discipline, however, they were isolated in self-contained classrooms. Future studies should investigate the disciplinary referrals and suspension rates of autistic students in self-contained classrooms and general education. Given that many autistic youth spend part of the day in the general education classroom, the

amount of time spent in the general education classroom should be investigated to see if it correlates to suspension rates in this population. Given the lack of disciplinary records for the youth in this study, this suggests that self-contained classrooms may be protective in some way for youth with disabilities. More research is needed to understand disciplinary experiences of Black autistic youth educated in general educational settings versus Black autistic youth who are educated in self-contained settings.

Concurrently, educators should create an inclusive classroom environment that is welcoming, engaging, and culturally affirming (Gay, 2002). Classrooms must be safe spaces where students are accepted as they are. Gay (2002) asserted that “culturally responsive teaching is creating classroom climates that are conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students” (p. 109).

Given the educational system’s historical racialized reality, white teachers must be aware of the potential for “strain” between them and their black students (Downey & Pribesh, 2004). Connor et al. (2019) argued that special education has never engaged in race discussion in a meaningful way. Downey and Pribesh (2004) argued that this “strain” between white teachers and Black students can be evident as early as kindergarten. For Black students to be successful, at a minimum, they need to experience teacher fairness. Additionally, Lynn et al. (2010) suggested that teachers and school personnel may blame Black families, their communities, and the students themselves for differences in academic achievement. Educators must be aware of their own biases, experiences, and personal histories and engage in self-reflective work, ensuring that they are intentional about providing inclusive and affirming environments for all of their students (Gay, 2002). Regrettably, students subjected to lower expectations, disproportionate discipline, and exclusionary treatment may experience school as a hostile environment (Kohli,

2018). Proffitt (2022) asserted, “Schools are often bastions of trauma for Black boys with and without disability labels” (p. 687). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that Black students are not achieving at rates comparable to their white peers. Educators must be aware of their role in creating an environment that cultivates educational equity.

Donnellan (1984) suggested the notion of least dangerous assumption, that with youth with disabilities, placing them into inclusive classrooms is almost always preferable given the long-term outcomes for students. This notion rests on the belief of presumed competence, the idea that educators should begin with the foundational expectation that students with disabilities are capable (Donnellan, 1984). However, some scholars have passionately rejected the idea of presumed competence (Travers & Ayres, 2015). Travers and Ayres (2015) argued that Donnellan’s (1984) argument is “obsolete” and “replaced by values for evidence, empiricism, experimentation, and logical consistency in a science of special education” (p. 373). While I understand their argument, Travers and Ayres seemed to be engaging in academic arrogance, devoid of acknowledgment of the historical role segregated classrooms have played in the education of Black youth. Of course, educators should assume that all youth, even youth with autism and communication challenges can learn. Educators must assume competence, and at the least, educators must find youth strengths, assets, and interest and build educational experience accordingly. Travers and Ayres’ push for evidence-based approaches is important; however, they must understand that evidence-based autism research is often synonymous with white-normed research (Steinbrenner et al., 2022). Travers and Ayres’ argument for “evidence, empiricism, experimentation, and logical consistency” must be historically grounded (p. 373). However, they continue, “Presuming competence is an idea without evidence and is a hazardous invitation to pseudoscience and other flawed thinking” (p. 384). This line of thinking is antithetical to the

attitudinal requirements for educators and others responsible for educating autistic youth. Often, youth with disabilities are not met with high expectations, and over fifty-five years ago, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) warned us that “expectations may become prophecies self-fulfilled” (p. 56). Youth with disabilities deserve high expectations because student expectations are especially detrimental to students. Today, we are still plagued with thinking that lacks high expectations for autistic youth and as educators, researchers, and administrators, it is important that we combat this thinking.

### **Implications for Researchers**

Findings from this study indicate a need for continued research that pursues the voices of Black youth. Previous studies have suggested that including autistic youth in research is not easy (Ellis, 2017; Preece, 2002). However, “It is important that all children have equal chances of participating in research, and the researcher is responsible for ensuring this” (Ellis, 2017, p. 24). As a result, future autism researchers should include racial and other demographic information so that the experiences of various populations can be compared and contrasted (Pierce et al., 2014). In this multiple case study analysis, I combined previous literature for insights into the lived experiences of autistic youth. I used several surveys and questionnaires specifically designed for interviewing autistic youth with diverse communication abilities to increase the likelihood that I would be able to capture their voice or perspective. It is important for researchers to include a multitude of tools for interviewing autistic youth (Preece, 2002). Researchers should design procedures that are varied, flexible, and culturally appropriate.

Qualitative research is vital in special education because it provides detailed and nuanced explanations for experiences not easily captured in numerical representations. Quantitative research methodologies are privileged in special education research (Connor et al., 2019).

However, qualitative, and quantitative data are both critically important in understanding, monitoring, and mitigating issues in special education (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Furthermore, both are needed in order for us to understand and measure special education results (Kauffman, 1993, p. 12). Gillborn et al. (2017) cautioned against the oversized influence of quantitative research, noting that quantitative data is no more objective than qualitative. Researchers need to be aware that the complexities of racialized disability will not be untangled with numbers alone because “numbers are not neutral” and require conceptualization for understanding and meaning (Gillborn et al., 2017). It is critically important that researchers acknowledge the historical realities of overrepresentation in their work. Researchers must not ground their work in specious logic under cover of complex mathematical models that feign superiority because these assertions can have real consequences (Connor et al., 2019; Gillborn et al., 2017). High-quality educational research includes the lived experiences of the people most affected by the populations being studied, and often quantitative research does not (Connor et al., 2019). However, there is a need for high-quality quantitative and qualitative research to help explore and solve these problems (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Connor et al., 2019). Researchers should be aware that no single methodological approach is sufficient. Case study methods were helpful in this study because I was able to collect socio-cultural data that informed my understanding of the experiences of the participants in this study. Case study methods were useful for helping me delve into the intricacies and nuanced experiences of three different case studies. This method allowed me to learn events from elementary all the way to high school involving each youth. However, there is a need for large scale, long-term, quantitative, and qualitative studies as well as replication studies that include representative sample populations to provide confidence in

previous studies that claim to be evidence-based but yet lack participant samples representative of the diversity of autistic individuals ethnically and racially.

There should be more research on Black voices, especially Black autistic youth voices, because all autistic youth deserve to have their educational experiences known. Researchers need to be aware that white voices are exceedingly present and dominant in special education research (Patton, 2015). Patton (1998) stated, “In the main, those who create, manufacture, and produce the knowledge base in special education historically have not included African Americans” (p. 27), which contributes to gaps in knowledge regarding their experiences. There is a continued and urgent need to diversify autism research, as others have noted (Bennett & Goodall, 2022; Jones & Mandell, 2020; Lovelace et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2014; Shaia et al., 2020). Lastly, researchers should be aware that the African American autism community is rich in diversity where individual and cultural experiences need to be explored to understand how it influences educational outcomes (Waitoller et al., 2010). The experiences of Black autistic youth need to be explored. Critically the experiences of Black autistic females and women require focused attention because within the autistic population, this group is the least researched and understood (Lovelace et al., 2021).

### **Implications for Policy**

More needs to be done to ensure access to high quality, high intensity and ongoing supports and interventions for Black and brown autistic youth as soon as possible in elementary school, with the goal of providing these youth with the best chance to realize their educational potential. Edmonds (1979) asserted decades ago that “there has never been a time in the life of the American public school when we have not known all we needed to in order to teach all those whom we chose to teach” (p. 16). I echo Edmonds today. We have the educational pedagogy to

successful teach youth with autism and we need to be better about providing this education. Despite the heterogeneity of autism, a first step in supporting autistic youth must be identifying student assets and strengths and building an individualized educational experience that highlights student potential and capability and not student deficits. To this end, I suggest that policies be enacted that requires IEPs focus on identifying student strengths and skills versus focusing on student deficits as occurred in this study. Youth with disabilities need access to high quality instruction that responds and adopts to the student and not vice versa.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its different iterations have gone a long way towards providing educational opportunities for youth with disabilities. A main requirement of IDEA is that youth have access to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. However, often students with disabilities have difficulty accessing the promises of IDEA. Providing youth with disabilities access to a high-quality opportunity enriching educational experiences must be the goal of our educational pursuits. I suggest that IDEA needs to be updated to improve transition planning requirements whereby metrics that capture postsecondary outcomes are required and reported nationally. That is, schools should be measured on their ability to connect youth with disabilities to employment services, educational services, social services, and other services specific to the needs of youth with disabilities given that we know often after high school youth lose access to key supports and services.

While educational laws are exceedingly important, they are limited by the people tasked with implementing them. Despite laws prohibiting segregating students with disabilities, these students are often subjected to racially segregated learning environments (Dunn, 1968; Graves & Ye, 2017; White et al., 2019). As illustrated in this study, the Black autistic youth have been predominantly assigned to self-contained classrooms almost their entire educational careers. To

this end, we need policy in place to prohibit the ongoing segregation of Black youth with disabilities into segregated settings. Policymakers must be aware that educational placement for students with disabilities plays a major role in student outcomes (Oh-Young & Filler, 2015). I reiterate this point again here, about the harms of self-contained classrooms for emphasis because self-contained classrooms historically, and contemporarily are bastions for harm for Black and brown youth.

### **Limitations**

Like all studies, there are important limitations. It was my goal to privilege the voices of Black autistic youth; while I was successful at gaining insight into the perspectives of Black autistic youth, I still relied heavily on the perspectives of the parents of the youth in this study. Many of the studies that pursue the voices of autistic youth often privilege the voices of the adults in the youth' life (Tesfaye et al., 2019). Importantly, access to Black autistic youth voices would not have been possible without the mothers of the youth in this study. More work is needed in this area where youth voices are pursued and highlighted. Future research should include longitudinal studies that track the experiences of Black autistic youth over extended periods of time such as the entirety of elementary school, middle school, and high school. This would provide opportunity for observations to witness youth in educational environments. There is a need for long-term research projects where researchers track the educational trajectory and progress of autistic youth and also implement novel interventions to support youth.

Gaining access to schools is increasingly difficult in the aftermath of COVID-19, in the context of increased mass shootings, and school policy changes for visitors in the face of increased threat potentialities. During my time as a graduate student, beginning in 2017, gaining access to autistic youth in school settings was difficult and, at times, impossible. Many of my

class projects had to be modified because I was unable to work directly with autistic youth and instead, I often had to work with their parents to conduct research. But, if at all possible, exploration into the educational experiences of autistic youth should include observing these students in their natural educational settings. This study did not. Future research should pursue observing Black autistic youth within their actual schools and classrooms. Observational information can provide rich data to further help contextualize the educational experiences of Black autistic youth.

Despite this limitation, this study contributes to the literature in multiple ways. This study demonstrates that it is possible to elicit the voices of Black autistic youth despite challenges associated with interviewing youth with autism. Additionally, this study provides insight into the educational experiences of Black autistic youth and how families navigate these challenges.

### **Addressing Educational Equity Through Scholarship and Policy**

It seems special education research often focuses on the negative educational experiences of marginalized students as opposed to exploring where students of color experience success (B. L. Wright et al., 2016). In pursuit of educationally equity scholarship, I think it is important to spotlight where African American students experience successes, self-empowerment, and achievement. For example, Wright et al. (2016) conducted a case study of African American males with intellectual disabilities and attention deficit hyperactive disorder who were academically high achieving. This study reflects the importance of challenging deficit frameworks and employing culturally responsive education in an environment where teachers hold high expectations for students. Deficit narratives dominate the educational landscape and perpetuate stereotypes regarding African American student achievement. Equitable educational

research focuses on counternarratives and reflecting achievements, not just challenges (B. L. Wright et al., 2016).

Remarkably, the issue of classroom inclusion of students with disabilities remains highly debated, with parties arguing for and against inclusion (Wehmeyer et al., 2021). But these debates are often shortsighted in that they do not properly acknowledge the historical ways that special education has been used as a vehicle for segregation (Craft & Howley, 2018). To this end, the debate should no longer be about including students with disabilities in mainstream general educational classrooms but how to do this well (Alquraini & Gut, 2012). In a literature review on inclusion of severely disabled students in general education settings, Alquraini and Gut (2012) reported improvements in “academic, social, and communication skills” (p. 54) for disabled youth who spent time in the general educational setting. Inclusion literature documents benefits associated with educating autistic youth and other youth with disabilities in general education classrooms. However, integrating autistic youth into the mainstream classroom needs to be done by skilled professionals.

### **Suggestions for Research**

More research is needed to understand the long-term outcomes for Black autistic youth after they exit high school and beyond. Additionally, findings in this study showed that Black autistic youth did not have any disciplinary records, a finding counter to other research. More work is needed to understand if there are different disciplinary risks for Black autistic youth educated in the general educational classroom versus the self-contained classroom. Importantly, future research is needed to explore (a) efficacious approaches to support Black autistic youth educational development in and outside of the classroom; (b) the role of affiliative humor in

autistic youth relationships and (c) social experiences of Black autistic youth with more pronounced autism presentation pursuant to understanding disability hierarchy.

## **Conclusions**

Given the lack of research examining the lived experiences of Black autistic youth and their families (Davis et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2022; Shaia et al., 2020; Steinbrenner et al., 2022; West et al., 2016), there is a clear need for research that explores the experiences of Black autistic families. Very little is known about the first-person perspectives of autistic youth (Kirby et al., 2015), and this study garnered insight into the voices of three autistic youth regarding their educational experiences.

I am reminded of Parsons et al. (2021) who asked, “How do we listen to those children who ‘have no words?’” and “What do we learn from them when we do?” (p. 162). This same question applies for youth who have limited verbal language, and figuring out how to engage with these youth is important. I agree with Ellis (2017) that “the process of including autistic youth in research is far from easy” (p. 24), but it is necessary, and the need for research is immediate. This study is one small step towards that direction. Tasha said it best when she responded to Ms. Wilson, “I can speak, I can speak.” Tasha, Lance, and Quan, I hear you.

## References

- Abudu, N. G., & Miles, R. E. (2017). Challenging the status quo: An integrated approach to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. *St. Thomas Law Review*, *30*(1), 56–67.
- Accardo, A. L., Kuder, S. J., & Woodruff, J. (2019). Accommodations and support services preferred by college students with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, *23*(3), 574–583.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318760490>
- Adu, P. (2019). *A step-by-step guide to qualitative data coding*. Routledge.
- Algozzine, B., & Hancock, D. (2017). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*. Teachers College Press.
- Allen, Q., & White-Smith, K. A. (2014). “Just as bad as prisons”: The challenge of dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline through teacher and community education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *47*(4), 445–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958961>
- Alquraini, T., & Gut, D. (2012). Critical components of successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities: Literature review. *International Journal of Special Education*, *27*(1), 42–59.
- Anderson-Chavarria, M. (2021). *Forgotten families of the sea and the sun: An ethnography of autism in Puerto Rico* (Publication No. 28497045) [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Annamma, S. A., & Handy, T. (2021). Sharpening justice through DisCrit: A contrapuntal analysis of education. *Educational Researcher*, *50*(1), 41–50.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20953838>

- Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 16*(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.730511>
- Annamma, S. A., Morrison, D., & Jackson, D. (2014). Disproportionality fills in the gaps: Connections between achievement, discipline and special education in the school-to-prison pipeline. *Berkeley Review of Education, 5*(1), 53–87. <https://doi.org/10.5070/B85110003>
- Artiles, A. J. (2011). Toward an interdisciplinary understanding of educational equity and difference: The case of the racialization of ability. *Educational Researcher, 40*(9), 431–445. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11429391>
- Artiles, A. J. (2013). Untangling the racialization of disabilities: An intersectionality critique across disability models. *Du Bois Review, 10*(2), 329–347. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000271>
- Artiles, A. J., & Trent, S. C. (1994). Overrepresentation of minority students in special education: A continuing debate. *The Journal of Special Education, 27*(4), 410–437. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002246699402700404>
- Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Trent, S. C., Osher, D., & Ortiz, A. (2010). Justifying and explaining disproportionality, 1968–2008: A critique of underlying views of culture. *Exceptional Children, 76*(3), 279–299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291007600303>
- Autismspeaks.org. (n.d.). *What is autism?* <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>

- Banks, J., Smith, P., & Neal, D. C. (2022). Identity politics: Exploring DisCrit's potential to empower activism and collective resistance. In S. A. Annamma, B. A. Ferri, & D. J. Connor (Eds.), *DisCrit expanded reverberations, ruptures, and inquires* (pp. 96–111). Teachers College Press.
- Baptiste, I. (2001). Educating lone wolves: Pedagogical implications of human capital theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51(3), 184–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07417130122087232>
- Bass, L., & Gerstl-Pepin, C. (2011). Declaring bankruptcy on educational inequity. *Educational Policy*, 25(6), 908–934. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904810386594>
- Bateman, K. J., & Wilson, S. E. (2021). Supporting diverse learners with autism through a culturally responsive visual communication intervention. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 56(5), 301–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451220963090>
- Bauminger, N., & Kasari, C. (2000). Loneliness and friendship in high-functioning children with autism. *Child Development*, 71(2), 447–456. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00156>
- Bell, C. (2020). “Maybe if they let us tell the story I wouldn’t have gotten suspended”: Understanding Black students’ and parents’ perceptions of school discipline. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 110, Article 104757. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.104757>
- Bennett, M., & Goodall, E. (2022). Researching African American autistics. In M. Bennett & E. Goodall (Eds.), *Addressing underserved populations in autism research* (1st ed., pp. 75–97). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80382-463-520221008>

- Beresford, B., Tozer, R., Rabiee, P., & Sloper, P. (2004). Developing an approach to involving children with autistic spectrum disorders in a social care research project. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32(4), 180–185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3156.2004.00318.x>
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality*. Doubleday.
- Bingham, A., & Witkowsky, P. (2022). Deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research: After the interview* (1st ed., pp. 133–148). SAGE Publications.
- Blacher, J., & Eisenhower, A. (2023). Preschool and child-care expulsion: Is it elevated for autistic children? *Exceptional Children*, 89(2), 178–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00144029221109234>
- Boshoff, K., Gibbs, D., Phillips, R. L., Wiles, L., & Porter, L. (2016). Parents' voices: 'Why and how we advocate.' A meta-synthesis of parents' experiences of advocating for their child with autism spectrum disorder. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 42(6), 784–797. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12383>
- Botha, M., Hanlon, J., & Williams, G. L. (2021). Does language matter? Identity-first versus person-first language use in autism research: A response to Vivanti. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04858-w>
- Bottema-Beutel, K., Josephine, C., Yoon, K. S., Crowley, S., & Scanlon, D. (2020). High school experiences and support recommendations of autistic youth. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(9), 3397–3412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04261-0>

- Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 18–29. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>
- Bottema-Beutel, K., Mullins, T. S., Harvey, M. N., Gustafson, J. R., & Carter, E. W. (2016). Avoiding the “brick wall of awkward”: Perspectives of youth with autism spectrum disorder on social-focused intervention practices. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 20(2), 196–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315574888>
- Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., & Richardson, V. (2005). Qualitative studies in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 71(2), 195–207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290507100205>
- Brede, J., Remington, A., Kenny, L., Warren, K., & Pellicano, E. (2017). Excluded from school: Autistic students’ experiences of school exclusion and subsequent re-integration into school. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2396941517737511>
- Broder-Fingert, S., Mateo, C., & Zuckerman, K. E. (2020). Structural racism and autism. *Pediatrics*, 146(3), Article e2020015420. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-015420>
- Burch, S., & Sutherland, I. (2006). Who’s not yet here? American disability history. *Radical History Review*, 2006(94), 127–147. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2006-94-127>
- Burkett, K., Morris, E., Manning-Courtney, P., Anthony, J., & Shambley-Ebron, D. (2015). African American families on autism diagnosis and treatment: The influence of culture. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(10), 3244–3254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2482-x>

- Carroll, C., & Twomey, M. (2021). Voices of children with neurodevelopmental disorders in qualitative research: A scoping review. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 33*(5), 709–724. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-020-09775-5>
- Carter, P. L., Skiba, R., Arredondo, M. I., & Pollock, M. (2017). You can't fix what you don't look at: Acknowledging race in addressing racial discipline disparities. *Urban Education, 52*(2), 207–235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916660350>
- Cascio, M. A., Weiss, J. A., & Racine, E. (2021). Making autism research inclusive by attending to intersectionality: A review of the research ethics literature. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 8*(1), 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-020-00204-z>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Data & statistics on autism spectrum disorder*. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>
- Cheng, S., & Starks, B. (2002). Racial differences in the effects of significant others on students' educational expectations. *Sociology of Education, 75*(4), 306–327. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3090281>
- Chiappero-Martinetti, E., & Sabadash, A. (2014). Integrating human capital and human capabilities in understanding the value of education. In S. Ibrahim (Ed.), *The capability approach: From theory to practice* (pp. 206–230). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chirgwin, S. K. (2015). Burdens too difficult to carry? A case study of three academically able indigenous Australian masters students who had to withdraw. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 28*(5), 594–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.916014>

- Chu, Y. (2019). What are they talking about when they talk about equity? A content analysis of equity principles and provisions in state every student succeeds act plans. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27, Article 158. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4558>
- Clark, M., & Adams, D. (2020). The self-identified positive attributes and favourite activities of children on the autism spectrum. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 72, Article 101512. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101512>
- Čolić, M., Araiba, S., Lovelace, T. S., & Dababnah, S. (2022). Black caregivers' perspectives on racism in ASD services: Toward culturally responsive ABA practice. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 15(4), 1032–1041. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-021-00577-5>
- Connor, D., Cavendish, W., Gonzalez, T., & Jean-Pierre, P. (2019). Is a bridge even possible over troubled waters? The field of special education negates the overrepresentation of minority students: A DisCrit analysis. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 22(6), 723–745. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1599343>
- Constantino, J. N., Abbacchi, A. M., May, B. K., Klaiman, C., Zhang, Y., Lowe, J. K., Marrus, N., Klin, A., & Geschwind, D. H. (2023). Prospects for leveling the playing field for Black children with autism. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 62(9), 949–952. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2023.05.005>
- Constantino, J. N., Abbacchi, A. M., Saulnier, C., Klaiman, C., Mandell, D. S., Zhang, Y., Hawks, Z., Bates, J., Klin, A., Shattuck, P., Molholm, S., Fitzgerald, R., Roux, A., Lowe, J. K., & Geschwind, D. H. (2020). Timing of the diagnosis of autism in African American children. *Pediatrics*, 146(3), Article e20193629. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-3629>

- Courchesne, V., Tesfaye, R., Mirenda, P., Nicholas, D., Mitchell, W., Singh, I., Zwaigenbaum, L., & Elsabbagh, M. (2022). Autism voices: A novel method to access first-person perspective of autistic youth. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(5), 1123–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211042128>
- Craft, E., & Howley, A. (2018). African American students' experiences in special education programs. *Teachers College Record*, 120(10), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811812001001>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Curry, T. J. (2017). *The man-not: Race, class, genre, and the dilemmas of Black manhood*. Temple University Press.
- Dababnah, S., Shaia, W. E., Champion, K., & Nichols, H. M. (2018). “We had to keep pushing”: Caregivers' perspectives on autism screening and referral practices of Black children in primary care. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 56(5), 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-56.5.321>
- Danker, J., Strnadová, I., & Cumming, T. M. (2019). Picture my well-being: Listening to the voices of students with autism spectrum disorder. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 89, 130–140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2019.04.005>
- Davis, A., Solomon, M., & Belcher, H. (2022). Examination of race and autism intersectionality among African American/Black young adults. *Autism in Adulthood*, 4(4), 306–314. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2021.0091>

- de Boer, H., Timmermans, A., & van der Werf, M. P. C. (2018). The effects of teacher expectation interventions on teachers' expectations and student achievement: narrative review and meta-analysis. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 24*(3–5), 180–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2018.1550834>
- Deal, M. (2003). Disabled people's attitudes toward other impairment groups: A hierarchy of impairments. *Disability & Society, 18*(7), 897–910. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759032000127317>
- DeMatthews, D. E., Serafini, A., & Watson, T. N. (2021). Leading inclusive schools: Principal perceptions, practices, and challenges to meaningful change. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 57*(1), 3–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X20913897>
- DePape, A. M., & Lindsay, S. (2016). Lived experiences from the perspective of individuals with autism spectrum disorder: A qualitative meta-synthesis. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 31*(1), 60–71.
- Diemer, M. C., Gerstein, E. D., & Regester, A. (2022). Autism presentation in female and Black populations: Examining the roles of identity, theory, and systemic inequalities. *Autism, 26*(8), 1931–1946. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221113501>
- Donnellan, A. M. (1984). The criterion of the least dangerous assumption. *Behavioral Disorders, 9*(2), 141–150.
- Downey, D. B., & Pribesh, S. (2004). When race matters: Teacher's evaluations of students' classroom behavior. *Sociology of Education, 77*, 267–282.
- Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded—Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children, 35*(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440296803500101>
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Education Leadership, 37*(1), 15–24.

- Egel, A. L., Richman, G. S., & Koegel, R. L. (1981). Normal peer models and autistic children's learning. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis, 14*(1), 3–12.  
<https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1981.14-3>
- Ellis, J. (2017). Researching the social worlds of autistic children: An exploration of how an understanding of autistic children's social worlds is best achieved. *Children & Society, 31*(1), 23–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12160>
- Epstein, R., Blake, J. J., & González, T. (2017). *Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood*. Georgetown University Law Center on Poverty and Inequality.
- Fayette, R., & Bond, C. (2018). A systematic literature review of qualitative research methods for eliciting the views of young people with ASD about their educational experiences. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 33*(3), 349–365.
- Fleury, V. P., Hedges, S., Hume, K., Browder, D. M., Thompson, J. L., Fallin, K., El Zein, F., Reutebuch, C. K., & Vaughn, S. (2014). Addressing the academic needs of adolescents with autism spectrum disorder in secondary education. *Remedial and Special Education, 35*(2), 68–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513518823>
- Ford, D. Y., & Russo, C. J. (2016). Historical and legal overview of special education overrepresentation: Access and equity denied. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners, 16*(1), 50–57. <https://doi.org/10.5555/2158-396X.16.1.50>
- Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B Ramos, Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970)

- Gabbay-Dizdar, N., Ilan, M., Meiri, G., Faroy, M., Michaelovski, A., Flusser, H., Menashe, I., Koller, J., Zachor, D. A., & Dinstein, I. (2022). Early diagnosis of autism in the community is associated with marked improvement in social symptoms within 1–2 years. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(6), 1353–1363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211049011>
- Gage, N. A., Whitford, D. K., Katsiyannis, A., Adams, S., & Jasper, A. (2019). National analysis of the disciplinary exclusion of Black students with and without disabilities. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(7), 1754–1764. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-019-01407-7>
- Gallagher, D. J., Connor, D. J., & Ferri, B. A. (2014). Beyond the far too incessant schism: Special education and the social model of disability. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18(11), 1120–1142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2013.875599>
- Gansen, H. M. (2021). Disciplining difference(s): Reproducing inequalities through disciplinary interactions in preschool. *Social Problems*, 68, 740–760. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaa011>
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053002003>
- Gentrup, S., Lorenz, G., Kristen, C., & Kogan, I. (2020). Self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom: Teacher expectations, teacher feedback and student achievement. *Learning and Instruction*, 66, Article 101296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2019.101296>
- Gerlinger, J., Viano, S., Gardella, J. H., Fisher, B. W., Curran, F. C., & Higgins, E. M. (2021). Exclusionary school discipline and delinquent outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(8), 1493–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01459-3>

- Gershenson, S., Holt, S. B., & Papageorge, N. W. (2016). Who believes in me? The effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations. *Economics of Education Review, 52*, 209–224.
- Gillborn, D., Warmington, P., & Demack, S. (2017). QuantCrit: Education, policy, ‘big data’ and principles for a critical race theory of statistics. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 21*(2), 158–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2017.1377417>
- Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., Reyes, C. R., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016). Do early educators’ implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions. *Yale University Child Study Center, 9*(28), 1–16.
- Ginwright, S. A. (2022). *The four pivots: Reimagining justice, reimagining ourselves*. North Atlantic Books.
- Goering, S. (2015). Rethinking disability: The social model of disability and chronic disease. *Current Reviews in Musculoskeletal Medicine, 8*(2), 134–138. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12178-015-9273-z>
- Gómez-Marí, I., Sanz-Cervera, P., & Tárraga-Mínguez, R. (2022). Teachers’ attitudes toward autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *Education Sciences, 12*, Article 138. <https://doi:10.3390/edusci12020138>
- Goodall, C. (2018). ‘I felt closed in and like I couldn’t breathe’: A qualitative study exploring the mainstream educational experiences of autistic young people. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments, 3*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2396941518804407>

- Goodall, C. (2020). Inclusion is a feeling, not a place: A qualitative study exploring autistic young people's conceptualisations of inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24(12), 1285–1310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1523475>
- Gopalan, M. (2019). Understanding the linkages between racial/ethnic discipline gaps and racial/ethnic achievement gaps in the United States. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27, Article 154. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4469>
- Gourdine, R. M., Baffour, T. D., & Teasley, M. (2011). Autism and the African American community. *Social Work in Public Health*, 26(4), 454–470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2011.579499>
- Graves, S. L., & Ye, F. F. (2017). Are special education labels accurate for Black children? Racial differences in academic trajectories of youth diagnosed with specific learning and intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 43(2), 192–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798416636280>
- Gustafsson, J. (2017). *Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: A comparative study*. Halmstad University. <http://hh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1064378/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Haegele, J. A., & Hodge, S. (2016). Disability discourse: Overview and critiques of the medical and social models. *Quest*, 68(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1143849>
- Hannon, M. D., White, E. E., & Nadrich, T. (2018). Influence of autism on fathering style among Black American fathers: A narrative inquiry. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 40(2), 224–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12165>

- Happé, F., & Frith, U. (2020). Annual research review: Looking back to look forward—Changes in the concept of autism and implications for future research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *61*(3), 218–232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13176>
- Harris, B., Barton, E. E., & McClain, M. B. (2020). Inclusion of racially and ethnically diverse populations in ASD intervention research. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, *73*, Article 101551. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101551>
- Hedley, D., Uljarević, M., Cameron, L., Halder, S., Richdale, A., & Dissanayake, C. (2017). Employment programmes and interventions targeting adults with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of the literature. *Autism*, *21*(8), 929–941. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316661855>
- Henry, D. A., Betancur Cortés, L., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2020). Black–White achievement gaps differ by family socioeconomic status from early childhood through early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *112*(8), 1471–1489. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000439>
- Hilton, C. L., Fitzgerald, R. T., Jackson, K. M., Maxim, R. A., Bosworth, C. C., Shattuck, P. T., Geschwind, D. H., & Constantino, J. N. (2010). Brief report: Under-representation of African Americans in autism genetic research: A rationale for inclusion of subjects representing diverse family structures. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *40*(5), 633–639. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-009-0905-2>
- Hines, E. M., Fletcher, E. C., Ford, D. Y., & Moore, J. L. (2021). Preserving innocence: Ending perceived adultification and toxic masculinity toward Black boys. *Journal of Family Strengths*, *21*(1), Article 1.

- Hines-Datiri, D., & Carter Andrews, D. J. (2020). The effects of zero tolerance policies on Black girls: Using critical race feminism and figured worlds to examine school discipline. *Urban Education, 55*(10), 1419–1440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917690204>
- Hogan, A. J. (2019). Moving away from the “medical model”: The development and revision of the World Health Organization’s classification of disability. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 93*(2), 241–269. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2019.0028>
- Howard, J., Copeland, N., Gifford, E. J., Lawson, J., Bai, Y., & Heilbron, N. (2021). Brief report: Classifying rates of students with autism and intellectual disability in North Caroline: Roles of race and economic disadvantage. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*, 307–314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04527-y>
- Huang, F. L. (2018). Do Black students misbehave more? Investigating the differential involvement hypothesis and out-of-school suspensions. *The Journal of Educational Research, 111*(3), 284–294.
- Humphrey, N., & Lewis, S. (2008). Make me normal: The views and experiences of pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream secondary schools. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 12*(1), 23–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361307085267>
- Jones, D. R., & Mandell, D. S. (2020). To address racial disparities in autism research, we must think globally, act locally. *Autism, 24*(7), 1587–1589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320948313>
- Jones, D. R., Nicolaidis, C., Ellwood, L. J., Garcia, A., Johnson, K. R., Lopez, K., & Waisman, T. C. (2020). An expert discussion on structural racism in autism research and practice. *Autism in Adulthood, 2*(4), 273–281. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29015.drj>

- Jordan, W. J. (2010). Defining equity: Multiple perspectives to analyzing the performance of diverse learners. *Review of Research in Education*, 34(1), 142–178.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X09352898>
- Jorgenson, C. (2005). The least dangerous assumption: A challenge to create a new paradigm. *Disability Solutions*, 6(3), 5–9.
- Kaffle, B. K. (2021). *The equity & social justice education 50: Critical questions for improving opportunities and outcomes for Black students*. ASCD.
- Kauffman, J. M. (1993). How we might achieve the radical reform of special education. *Exceptional Children*, 60(1), 6–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440299306000102>
- Kirby, A. V., White, T. J., & Baranek, G. T. (2015). Caregiver strain and sensory features in children with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 120(1), 32–45.  
<https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-120.1.32>
- Koffer Miller, K. H., Cooper, D. S., Ventimiglia, J. C., & Shea, L. L. (2023). Feeling intimidated and uncomfortable: Established and exacerbated educational inequities experienced by Black parents of autistic children. *Autism Research*, 16(5), 1040–1051.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2919>
- Kohli, R. (2018). Behind school doors: The impact of hostile racial climates on urban teachers of color. *Urban Education*, 53(3), 307–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916636653>
- Kozleski, E. (2020). Disrupting what passes as inclusive education: Predicting educational equity on schools designed for all. *The Educational Forum*, 84(4), 340–355.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2020.1801047>

- Krezmien, M. P., Travers, J. C., & Camacho, K. (2017). Suspension rates of students with autism or intellectual disabilities in Maryland from 2004 to 2015: Suspension of students with autism or intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, *61*(11), 1011–1020. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12406>
- Krumpelman, M. L., & Hord, C. (2021). Experiences of young adults with autism without co-occurring intellectual disability: A review of the literature. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, *56*(1), 70–82.
- Kuo, A. A., Crapnell, T., Lau, L., Anderson, K. A., & Shattuck, P. (2018). Stakeholder perspectives on research and practice in autism and transition. *Pediatrics*, *141*(Suppl. 4), S293–S299. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-4300F>
- Kurth, J. A. (2015). Educational placement of students with autism: The impact of state of residence. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, *30*(4), 249–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357614547891>
- Kurth, J. A., & Mastergeorge, A. M. (2010). Academic and cognitive profiles of students with autism: Implications for classroom practice and placement. *International Journal of Special Education*, *25*(2), 8–14.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, *35*(7), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035007003>
- Lang, R. (2007). *The development and critique of the social model of disability*. Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology-health-care/sites/epidemiology-health-care/files/wp-3.pdf>

- Leadbitter, K., Aldred, C., McConachie, H., Le Couteur, A., Kapadia, D., Charman, T., Macdonald, W., Salomone, E., Emsley, R., Green, J., & The PACT Consortium. (2018). The Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (AFEQ): An ecologically-valid, parent-nominated measure of family experience, quality of life and prioritised outcomes for early intervention. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *48*, 1052–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3350-7>
- Lebenhagen, C. (2022). Autistic students' views on meaningful inclusion: A Canadian perspective. *Journal of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574221101378>
- Leko, M. M., Cook, B. G., & Cook, L. (2021). Qualitative methods in special education research. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, *36*(4), 278–286. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12268>
- Lewis, E. M., Dababnah, S., Hollie, K. R., Kim, I., Wang, Y., & Shaia, W. E. (2022). The creator did not give me more than I can handle: Exploring coping in parents of Black autistic children. *Autism*, *26*(8), 2015–2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211070865>
- Locke, J., Rotheram-Fuller, E., & Kasari, C. (2012). Exploring the social impact of being a typical peer model for included children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *42*, 1895–1905. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-011-1437-0>
- Lopez, A. E., & Jean-Marie, G. (2021). Challenging anti-Black racism in everyday teaching, learning, and leading: From theory to practice. *Journal of School Leadership*, *31*(1–2), 50–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684621993115>

- Losh, A., Bolourian, Y., Rodriguez, G., Eisenhower, A., & Blacher, J. (2022). Early student-teacher relationships and autism: Student perspectives and teacher concordance. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 79*, Article 101394.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2022.101394>
- Losh, A., Eisenhower, A., & Blacher, J. (2022). Impact of student-teacher relationship quality on classroom behavioral engagement for young students on the autism spectrum. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 98*, Article 102027.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2022.102027>
- Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.
- Lovelace, T. S., Comis, M. P., Tabb, J. M., & Oshokoya, O. E. (2021). Missing from the narrative: A seven-decade scoping review of the inclusion of Black autistic women and girls in autism research. *Behavior Analysis in Practice, 15*(4), 1093–1105.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-021-00654-9>
- Lovelace, T. S., Robertson, R. E., & Tamayo, S. (2018). Experiences of African American mothers of sons with autism spectrum disorder: Lessons for improving service delivery. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 53*(1), 3–16.
- Lynn, M., Bacon, J. N., Totten, T. L., Bridges, T. L., & Jennings, M. (2010). Examining teachers' beliefs about African American male students in a low-performing high school in an African American school district. *Teachers College Record, 112*(1), 289–330  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811011200106>

- MacMillan, D. L., & Reschly, D. J. (1998). Overrepresentation of minority students: The case for greater specificity or reconsideration of the variables examined. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002246699803200103>
- Maenner, M. J., Warren, Z., Williams, A. R., Amoakohene, E., Bakian, A. V., Bilder, D. A., Durkin, M. S., Fitzgerald, R. T., Furnier, S. M., Hughes, M. M., Ladd-Acosta, C. M., McArthur, D., Pas, E. T., Salinas, A., Vehorn, A., Williams, S., Esler, A., Grzybowski, A., Hall-Lande, J., ... Shaw, K. A. (2023). Prevalence and characteristics of autism spectrum disorder among children aged 8 years – Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 sites, United States, 2020. *MMWR. Surveillance Summaries, 72*(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7202a1>
- Magaña, S., Parish, S. L., Rose, R. A., Timberlake, M., & Swaine, J. G. (2012). Racial and ethnic disparities in quality of health care among children with autism and other developmental disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 50*(4), 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-50.4.287>
- Mallett, C. A. (2016). The school-to-prison pipeline: A critical review of the punitive paradigm shift. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 33*(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-015-0397-1>
- Malone, K. M., Pearson, J. N., Palazzo, K. N., Manns, L. D., Rivera, A. Q., & Mason Martin, D. L. (2022). The scholarly neglect of Black autistic adults in autism research. *Autism in Adulthood, 4*(4), 271–280. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2021.0086>

- Mandell, D. S., Listerud, J., Levy, S. E., & Pinto-Martin, J. A. (2002). Race differences in the age at diagnosis among Medicaid-eligible children with autism. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 41*(12), 1447–1453.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200212000-00016>
- Manns, W. (1981). *Significant others in the lives of Black social workers and White social workers* (Publication No. T-28034) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Marchand, A. D., Vassar, R., Diemer, M., & Rowley, S. (2019). Integrating race, racism, and critical consciousness in Black parents' engagement with schools. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 11*(3), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12344>
- Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the humor styles questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality, 37*(1), 48–75.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566\(02\)00534-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00534-2)
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Maye, M., Boyd, B. A., Martínez-Pedraza, F., Halladay, A., Thurm, A., & Mandell, D. S. (2021). Biases, barriers, and possible solutions: Steps towards addressing autism researchers under-engagement with racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse communities. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 52*(9), 4206–4211.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05250-y>
- Mazama, A. (2007). The Barack Obama phenomenon. *Journal of Black Studies, 38*(1), 3–6.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934707305157>

- Migliarini, V., & Annamma, S. A. (2020). Classroom and behavior management: (Re)conceptualization through disability critical race theory. In R. Papa (Ed.), *Handbook on promoting social justice in education* (pp. 1511–1532). Springer.
- Mihas, P. (2022). Memo writing strategies: Analyzing the parts and the whole. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research: After the interview* (pp. 243–257). SAGE Publications.
- Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 388–400.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309471>
- Milton, D. E. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: The ‘double empathy problem’. *Disability & Society*, 27(6), 883–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.710008>
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), Article 159.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>
- Moule, J. (2009). Understanding unconscious bias and unintentional racism. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(5), 320–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170909000504>
- Oh-Young, C., & Filler, J. (2015). A meta-analysis of the effects of placement on academic and social skill outcome measures of students with disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 47, 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2015.08.014>
- Oliver, M. (1983). *Social work with disabled people*. MacMillian Press.
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. St. Martin’s Press.

- Oredipe, T., Kofner, B., Riccio, A., Cage, E., Vincent, J., Kapp, S. K., Dwyer, P., & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2023). Does learning you are autistic at a younger age lead to better adult outcomes? A participatory exploration of the perspectives of autistic university students. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 27(1), 200–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221086700>
- Parsons, S., Ivil, K., Kovshoff, H., & Karakosta, E. (2021). “Seeing is believing”: Exploring the perspectives of young autistic children through digital stories. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 19(2), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X20951235>
- Paschall, K. W., Gershoff, E. T., & Kuhfeld, M. (2018). A two decade examination of historical race/ethnicity disparities in academic achievement by poverty status. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47(6), 1164–1177. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0800-7>
- Pater, M., Spreen, M., & van Yperen, T. (2021). The developmental progress in social behavior of children with autism spectrum disorder getting music therapy. A multiple case study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 120, Article 105767. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105767>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Paul-Emile, K. (2018). Blackness as disability? *The Georgetown Law Journal*, 106(2), 293–364.
- Payne-Tsoupros, C., & Johnson, N. (2022). A DisCrit call for the abolition of school police. In A. Annamma, B. Ferri, & D. Connor (Eds.), *DisCrit expanded: Reverberations, ruptures, and inquiries* (pp. 112–128). Teachers College Press.

- Pearson, J. N. (2017). *Fostering advocacy, communication, empowerment and support (FACES) for African American families of children with autism: A pilot study* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]. IDEALS.  
<https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/items/102379>
- Pearson, J. N., & Meadan, H. (2018). African American parents' perceptions of diagnosis and services for children with autism. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 53*(1), 17–32. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1179135.pdf>
- Pearson, J. N., & Meadan, H. (2021). FACES: An advocacy intervention for African American parents of children with autism. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 59*(2), 155–171. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-59.2.155>
- Pearson, J. N., Meadan, H., Malone, K. M., & Martin, B. M. (2020). Parent and professional experiences supporting African-American children with autism. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, 7*(2), 305–315. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-019-00659-9>
- Pearson, J. N., Stewart-Ginsburg, J. H., Malone, K., & Avent Harris, J. R. (2022). Faith and FACES: Black parents' perceptions of autism, faith, and coping. *Exceptional Children, 88*(3), 316–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00144029211034152>
- Pierce, N. P., O'Reilly, M. F., Sorrells, A. M., Fragale, C. L., White, P. J., Aguilar, J. M., & Cole, H. A. (2014). Ethnicity reporting practices for empirical research in three autism-related journals. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44*(7), 1507–1519. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-014-2041-x>

- Pope, L., Light, J., & Franklin, A. (2022). Black children with developmental disabilities receive less augmentative and alternative communication intervention than their white peers: Preliminary evidence of racial disparities from a secondary data analysis. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 31(5), 2159–2174.  
[https://doi.org/10.1044/2022\\_AJSLP-22-00079](https://doi.org/10.1044/2022_AJSLP-22-00079)
- Preece, D. (2002). Consultation with children with autistic spectrum disorders about their experience of short-term residential care. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 30(3), 97–104. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1468-3156.2002.00179.x>
- Preece, D., & Jordan, R. (2009). Obtaining the views of children and young people with autism spectrum disorders about their experience of daily life and social care support. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(1), 10–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3156.2009.00548.x>
- Proffitt, W. A. (2022). From “problems” to “vulnerable resources”: Reconceptualizing Black boys with and without disability labels in U.S. urban schools. *Urban Education*, 57(4), 686–713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920972164>
- Ramclam, A. N., Truong, D. M., Mire, S. S., Smoots, K. D., McNeel, M. M., Sakyi, G. J., & Daniels, F. M. (2022). Autism disparities for Black children: Acknowledging and addressing the problem through culturally responsive and socially just assessment practices. *Psychology in the Schools*, 59(7), 1445–1453.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22646>
- Reid, D. K., & Knight, M. G. (2006). Disability justifies exclusion of minority students: A critical history grounded in disability studies. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 18–23.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035006018>

- Riccio, A., Kapp, S. K., Jordan, A., Dorelien, A. M., & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2021). How is autistic identity influenced by parental disclosure decisions and perceptions of autism? *Autism, 25*(2), 374–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320958214>
- Richards, J. C. (2022). Coding, categorizing, and theming the data. A reflexive search for meaning. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative research: After the interview* (pp. 149–168) SAGE Publications.
- Rios-Aguilar, C., Kiyama, J. M., Gravitt, M., & Moll, L. C. (2011). Funds of knowledge for the poor and forms of capital for the rich? A capital approach to examining funds of knowledge. *Theory and Research in Education, 9*(2), 163–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878511409776>
- Rivera-Figueroa, K., Marfo, N. Y. A., & Eigsti, I. (2022). Parental perceptions of autism spectrum disorder in Latinx and Black sociocultural contexts: A systematic review. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 127*(1), 42–63. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-127.1.42>
- Robison, J. E. (2019). Autism prevalence and outcomes in older adults. *Autism Research, 12*(3), 370–374. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2080>
- Rosenbaum, J. (2020). Educational and criminal justice outcomes 12 years after school suspension. *Youth & Society, 52*(4), 515–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X17752208>
- Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

- Roux, A. M., Shattuck, P. T., Rast, J. E., & Rava, J. A. (2015). *A national autism indicator report: Transition into young adulthood. Life Course Outcomes Research Program*. A. J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University.  
<https://doi.org/10.17918/NAIRTransition2015>
- Roux, A. M., Shea, L. L., Steinberg, H., Rast, J. E., Anderson, K. A., Hotez, E., Rosenau, K., Kuo, A., Assing-Murray, E., & Shattuck, P. T. (2023). Evidence from the Autism Transitions Research Project (2017–2022): Capstone review and services research recommendations. *Autism Research, 16*(3), 480–496. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2890>
- Sala, G., & Gobet, F. (2016). Do the benefits of chess instruction transfer to academic and cognitive skills? A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review, 18*, 46–57.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2016.02.002>
- Sanders, K. Y. (2006). Overprotection and lowered expectations of persons with disabilities: The unforeseen consequences. *Work, 27*(2), 181–188.
- Santiago-Rosario, M. R., Whitcomb, S. A., Pearlman, J., & McIntosh, K. (2021). Associations between teacher expectations and racial disproportionality in discipline referrals. *Journal of School Psychology, 85*, 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2021.02.004>
- Sciutto, M., Richwine, S., Mentrikoski, J., & Niedzwiecki, K. (2012). A qualitative analysis of the school experiences of students with Asperger syndrome. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 27*(3), 177–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357612450511>
- Shaia, W. E., Nichols, H. M., Dababnah, S., Champion, K., & Garbarino, N. (2020). Brief report: Participation of Black and African-American families in autism research. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 50*(5), 1841–1846. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03926-0>

- Simpson, K., Imms, C., & Keen, D. (2022). The experience of participation: Eliciting the views of children on the autism spectrum. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 44(9), 1700–1708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2021.1903100>
- Singh, J. (2023). Intersectional analysis of autism service inequities: Narratives of Black single female caregivers. *Qualitative Research in Health*, 3, Article 100234. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2023.100234>
- Smith, K. A., Gehricke, J. G., Iadarola, S., Wolfe, A., & Kuhlthau, K. A. (2020). Disparities in service use among children with autism: A systematic review. *Pediatrics*, 145(s1), 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1895G>
- Soohoo, S. (2013). Humility within culturally responsive methodologies. In M. Beryman, S. Soohoo, & A. Nevin. (Eds.), *Culturally responsive methodologies* (pp. 199–219). Emerald Publishing.
- Stafford, L. (2017). ‘What about my voice’: Emancipating the voices of children with disabilities through participant-centered methods. *Children’s Geographies*, 15(5), 600–613. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1295134>
- Stafford, L. (2017). “What about my voice”: Emancipating the voices of children with disabilities through participant-centred methods. *Children’s Geographies*, 15(5), 600–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1295134>
- Stahmer, A. C., Vojnoska, S., Iadarola, S., Straiton, D., Segovia, F. R., Luelmo, P., Morgan, E. H., Lee, H. S., Javed, A., Bronstein, B., Hochheimer, S., Cho, E., Aranbarri, A., Mandell, D., Hassrick, E. M., Smith, T., & Kasari, C. (2019). Caregiver voices: Cross-cultural input on improving access to autism services. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 6(4), 752–773. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-019-00575-y>

- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE Publications.
- Stapleton, L., & James, L. (2020). Not another all white study: Challenging color-evasiveness ideology in disability scholarship [Practice brief]. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 33(3), 215–222. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1281055.pdf>
- Starck, J. G., Riddle, T., Sinclair, S., & Warikoo, N. (2020). Teachers are people too: Examining the racial bias of teachers compared to other American adults. *Educational Researcher*, 49(4), 273–284. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20912758>
- Stedman, A., Taylor, B., Erard, M., Peura, C., & Siegel, M. (2019). Are children severely affected by autism spectrum disorder underrepresented in treatment studies? An analysis of the literature. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 49(4), 1378–1390. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3844-y>
- Steinbrenner, J. R., McIntyre, N., Rentschler, L. F., Pearson, J. N., Luelmo, P., Jaramillo, M. E., Boyd, B. A., Wong, C., Nowell, S. W., Odom, S. L., & Hume, K. A. (2022). Patterns in reporting and participant inclusion related to race and ethnicity in autism intervention literature: Data from a large-scale systematic review of evidence-based practices. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(8), 2026–2040. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211072593>
- Stenhouse, L. (1997). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*. Heinemann. (Original work published 1975)
- Sullivan, A. L., Van Norman, E. R., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2014). Exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities: Student and school characteristics predicting suspension. *Remedial and Special Education*, 35(4), 199–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513519825>

- Taboas, A., Doepke, K., & Zimmerman, C. (2023). Preferences for identity-first versus person-first language in a US sample of autism stakeholders. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 27(2), 565–570. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221130845>
- Taylor, B. A., & DeQuinzio, J. A. (2012). Observational learning and children with autism. *Behavior Modification*, 36(3), 341–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445512443981>
- Terzi, L. (2004). The social model of disability: A philosophical critique. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 21(2), 141–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0264-3758.2004.00269.x>
- Tesfaye, R., Courchesne, V., Yusuf, A., Savion-Lemieux, T., Singh, I., Shikako-Thomas, K., Miranda, P., Waddell, C., Smith, I. M., Nicholas, D., Szatmari, P., Bennett, T., Duku, E., Georgiades, S., Kerns, C., Vaillancourt, T., Zaidman-Zaiat, A., Zwaigenbaum, L., & Elsabbagh, M. (2019). Assuming ability of youth with autism: Synthesis of methods capturing the first-person perspectives of children and youth with disabilities. *Autism*, 23(8), 1882–1896. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319831487>
- Thomas, G. (2021). *How to do your case study*. SAGE Publications.
- Thorius, K. A., & Tan, P. (2016). Expanding analysis of educational debt: Considering intersections of race and ability. In S. A. Annamma (Ed.), *DisCrit disability studies and critical race theory in education* (pp. 87–97). Teachers College Press.
- Travers, J., & Ayres, K. (2015). A critique of presuming competence of learners with autism or other developmental disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 50(4), 371–387.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018). *K-12 education: Discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-258>

- Vivanti, G. (2020). Ask the editor: What is the most appropriate way to talk about individuals with a diagnosis of autism? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(2), 691–693. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04280-x>
- Voulgarides, C. K. (2022). The promises and pitfalls of mandating racial equity in special education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 103(6), 14–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221082804>
- Waitoller, F. R., Artiles, A. J., & Cheney, D. A. (2010). The miner’s canary: A review of overrepresentation research and explanations. *The Journal of Special Education*, 44(1), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466908329226>
- Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 9–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.51>
- Walker, M. (2012). A capital or capabilities education narrative in a world of staggering inequalities? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(3), 384–393. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.09.003>
- Wang, S., Rubie-Davies, C. M., & Meissel, K. (2018). A systematic review of the teacher expectation literature over the past 30 years. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 24(3–5), 124–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2018.1548798>
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., & Kurth, J. (2021). The state of inclusion with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 18(1), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12332>

- West, E. A., Travers, J. C., Kemper, T. D., Liberty, L. M., Cote, D. L., McCollow, M. M., & Stansberry Brusnahan, L. L. (2016). Racial and ethnic diversity of participants in research supporting evidence-based practices for learners with autism spectrum disorder. *The Journal of Special Education, 50*(3), 151–163.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466916632495>
- White, J. M., Li, S., Ashby, C. E., Ferri, B., Wang, Q., Bern, P., & Cosier, M. (2019). Same as it ever was: The nexus of race, ability, and place in one urban school district. *Educational Studies, 55*(4), 453–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2019.1630130>
- White, M. A. (2022). Strength-based teaching and positive humanities in schools. In M. A. Willis & F. McCallum (Eds.), *Transforming teaching: Wellbeing and professional practice* (pp. 13–31). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-4945-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-4945-6_2)
- Wilder, L. K., Dyches, T. T., Obiakor, F. E., & Algozzine, B. (2004). Multicultural perspectives on teaching students with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(2), 105–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576040190020601>
- Williams, E. G., Smith, M. J., Sherwood, K., Lovelace, T. S., & Bishop, L. (2022). Brief report: Initial evidence of depressive symptom disparities among Black and white transition age autistic youth. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 52*(8), 3740–3745.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/sWilliams10803-021-05242-y>
- Williams, E. I., Gleeson, K., & Jones, B. E. (2019). How pupils on the autism spectrum make sense of themselves in the context of their experiences in a mainstream school setting: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Autism, 23*(1), 8–28.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361317723836>

- Williams, P. G., Allard, A. M., & Sears, L. (1996). Case study: Cross-gender preoccupations in two male children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 26(6), 635–642. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02172352>
- Winstone, N., Huntington, C., Goldsack, L., Kyrou, E., & Millward, L. (2014). Eliciting rich dialogue through the use of activity-oriented interviews: Exploring self-identity in autistic young people. *Childhood*, 21(2), 190–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568213491771>
- Wint, K. M., Opara, I., Gordon, R., & Brooms, D. R. (2022). Countering educational disparities among Black boys and Black adolescent boys from pre-K to high school: A life course-intersectional perspective. *The Urban Review*, 54(2), 183–206. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-021-00616-z>
- Wolfberg, P., & Schuler, A. (1993, March 25–28). *A case illustration of the impact of peer play on symbolic activity in autism* [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, New Orleans, LA, United States.
- Woods, R. (2017). Exploring how the social model of disability can be re-invigorated for autism: In response to Jonathan Levitt. *Disability & Society*, 32(7), 1090–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1328157>
- Worrell, F. C. (2022). Who will teach the teachers? Examining implicit bias in the educator workforce. *Learning and Instruction*, 78, Article 101518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2021.101518>
- Wright, B. L., Crawford, F., & Counsell, S. L. (2016). The other half hasn't been told: African American males and their success in special education. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 7(1), 35–51.

- Wright, J. P., Morgan, M. A., Coyne, M. A., Beaver, K. M., & Barnes, J. C. (2014). Prior problem behavior accounts for the racial gap in school suspensions. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42, 257–266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2014.01.001>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Young, J. L., Young, J. R., & Butler, B. R. (2018). A student saved is NOT a dollar earned: A meta-analysis of school disparities in discipline practice toward Black children. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 17(4), 95–112. <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.4.06>
- Yull, D., & Wilson, M. (2018). Keeping Black children pushed into, not pushed out of, classrooms: Developing a race-conscious parent engagement project. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 44(2), 162–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798417753519>
- Zhang, D., & Katsiyannis, A. (2002). Minority representation in special education: A persistent challenge. *Remedial and Special Education*, 23(3), 180–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325020230030601>
- Zilli, C., Parsons, S., & Kovshoff, H. (2020). Keys to engagement: A case study exploring the participation of autistic pupils in educational decision-making at school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(3), 770–789. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12331>

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Research Procedures

- Recruitment Flyer (Appendix B)
- Parental phone screening (Appendix C)
- Obtain parent and parental informed consent
- Parent Pre-Interview Survey (Appendix D)
- Parent Demographic Survey (Appendix E)
- Parent Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (Appendix F)
- Scheduled interviews (30 minutes – 2 hours each).
- Interview Protocol (Appendix G)
  - a. Interview 1
    1. Introductions, Assent, and warm-up (provide interview cards – Appendix M)  
My Teacher and Me Questionnaire (Appendix H), Asset Based Protocol (Appendix I),  
Me at School Activity (Appendix J), \*Friendship and Disclosure Questionnaire  
(Appendix K)
  - b. Interview 2
    1. Introductions, Assent, and warm-up (provide interview cards – Appendix M)  
My Teacher and Me Questionnaire (Appendix H), Asset Based Protocol (Appendix I),  
Me at School Activity (Appendix J)
  - c. Interview 3 (If needed)
    1. Introductions, Assent, and warm-up (provide interview cards – Appendix M)  
My Teacher and Me Questionnaire (Appendix H), Asset Based Protocol (Appendix I),  
Me at School Activity (Appendix J)
- Teacher / service provider questionnaire (Appendix L)

\*Because parents in this study did not “disclose” or openly discuss their child’s autism diagnosis the Friendship and Disclosure Questionnaire was not utilized in this study. However, this tool is included for future researchers.

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Flyer

**ARE YOU THE  
PARENT OF A  
BLACK CHILD  
WITH AUTISM?**



**We are conducting a study on the educational experiences of Black autistic youth to gain first-person insight into how these students and families navigate schooling.**

**PARENTS WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

#### BLACK AUTISTIC YOUTH

Eligible participants must be a) Middle school or High school age  
b) Black/ African American c) Autistic

Families/ Participants who complete the study requirements will receive a \$100 gift card.

The study will take 1 month to complete. Youth will be interviewed (3) times for 1 hour - 1.5 hours.

Parents will be asked to complete questionnaires  
Teacher(s) familiar with the student will be asked to complete a questionnaire.

For more information, please contact: Lonnie D. Manns,  
lmanns@ncsu.edu  
919-904-9017

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

## Appendix C

### Parental Phone Screening

**Researcher:** Hi! My name is Lonnie D. Manns and I am a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University. I am a father of an autistic 10-year-old son and I am interested in understanding the educational experiences of Black autistic from their own perspectives.

Thank you for responding to my recruitment flyer. I am reaching out now to confirm your interest and your child's eligibility for my study. If this is a good time, I will continue, if not please let me know a time to reschedule for this discussion.

**Parent/Guardian: If "yes" continue. If not, reschedule.**

**Researcher:** Wonderful! First, I would like to review the participant criteria with you to make sure this will be a good fit:

1. Self-identification as Black or African American for the child (defined by parent)
2. Middle school or high school age
3. Autism diagnosis

**Researcher:** (*if NO to ANY*) Thank you so much for your interest, but it sounds like some of the criteria are not met for this study (explain criteria that are not met). Thank you so much for your interest and your time. We will keep you in mind in the future!

**Researcher:** (*if yes to ALL*) Great! I'd like to explain a little more about the study and if you're still on board, we'll move forward with the consent process.

I am conducting research focused on eliciting student perspective, attitudes, and voices of Black autistic youth regarding the educational experiences. As a father I am interested in understanding the lived experiences of other families with autistic children like me. I know that each child is different but if my child were to be interviewed by a complete stranger, he would likely be very hesitant to participate. To that end, I have designed an interview process with the goal of building rapport and comfort for your child. I have an activity-based or a game based process where I will introduce your child to the game of chess at the beginning of each interview. This will include learning the basics such as the names of the pieces and how they move as well as the goals of the game.

My research involves (3) separate activity-based interviews. Each interview should last between one and one and a half hours. Interviews will take place at a place of your choosing (i.e. local library, school, or your home). It is expected that the interview process will take no longer than one month.

In addition to interviewing your child, I will request that you complete a questionnaire regarding your experiences supporting your child. Lastly, we will ask, if you are willing for me to ask questions of your child's teacher(s) or service provider about their experiences supporting your child.

**Researcher:** Do you think you would be willing to go through with all of these components of the study? Do you have any questions about the study?

**Participant:** (response)

**Researcher:** In order for you and your child to participate in the study I will need your authorization also known as informed consent and also the consent of your child. I will provide a hardcopy of the document, or I will email a copy for you to review and sign. Once I receive the signed consent document I will schedule an introduction meeting to provide additional details about the project and to introduce myself to your child before we schedule interviews.

I appreciate your time. If you should have any questions or concerns, please reach me at [lmanns@ncsu.edu](mailto:lmanns@ncsu.edu) or 919-904-9017.

## Appendix D

### Parent Pre-Interview Survey

IDENTIFIER \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

This survey is designed to help us understand how your child prefers to communicate. You are the expert regarding your child's interests and abilities and your insight is key in helping me design an interview plan that best supports your child. The goal is to gain insight into the everyday educational experiences of your child by accessing their perspective.

**What is your child's preferred method of communication with you or others?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(Probe: How do they respond to questions?)

**Does your child require a device to communicate or other assistance?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Is your child comfortable with:**

- Oral language
- Written language (texting, typing or writing)
- Drawing
- Pointing at Images

**In your experience, who is your child most comfortable communicating with?**

- Parent
- Sibling
- Teacher
- Friend
- Researcher

**How old is your child?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How old was your child when they were diagnosed?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you have any difficulty getting your child evaluated? Please explain.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Have you disclosed your child’s diagnosis to them?**

---

Note: Your child’s diagnosis and the terms “autism” or “ASD” will not be mentioned or discussed with your child if you have not disclosed to them.

**Does your child feel comfortable talking about their diagnosis or “autism”?**

---

**Can you provide a list of interests, activities, food or games your child enjoys?**

---

**Are there certain topics your child finds uncomfortable that I should avoid?**

---

**Do you currently have any pets? If so, what kind and what are the names?**

---

**Does your child have friends? A best friend?**

---

**Does your child elope (run away)? Or are there any safety issues I need to be aware of?**

---

**Is there anything else you think I should be aware of before our interview?**

---

**Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions or concerns at this time?**

**You are invited to be present during the interview**

Adapted from *ASD Voices Prep Visit* Supplemental Data (Courchesne et al., 2022)

## Appendix E

### Parent Demographic Questions

Please skip any questions you prefer not to answer or are not comfortable answering.

4. How old was your child when they were diagnosed? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Does your child have any other diagnosis? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you satisfied with the level of support you are receiving from your child's school? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you happy with your child's school? Please explain?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Are you satisfied with the level of support you are receiving from your child's Service providers (Doctors, speech therapy, occupational therapy etc.? If no, please explain.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Has your child been suspended or expelled before? If so, how often?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Does your child have any siblings? If so, what are their ages? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your highest level of education? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your marital status? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is your annual household income? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Autism Family Experience Questionnaire (AFEQ)

#### EXPERIENCE OF BEING A PARENT OF A CHILD WITH AUTISM

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
No	Item	1	2	3	4	5	
1	I lack confidence in knowing how to help my child						
2	I feel listened to by professionals						
3	Working with therapists or professionals helps me feel confident						
4	I am confident that I understand my child's level of development						
5	I feel I know how to help my child progress						
6	I feel I'm getting it wrong						
7	I have realistic milestones for my child's development						
8	I doubt my ability to help my child's development						
9	I feel frustrated at not knowing how to help my child						
10	I have coping mechanisms to help my child						
11	Professionals don't understand my family's needs						
12	It's a continual battle to get the right help for my child						
13	My child is getting the right help						

## FAMILY LIFE

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
	Item	1	2	3	4	5	
	Family life is a battle						
	I feel guilty about not giving other members of the family enough attention						
	My child is flexible in adapting to the demands of family life						
	Family life is calm						
	I know how to cope with my child when going on an outing in a public place e.g. café or restaurant						
	I feel confident to go out to family events with my child						
	I feel confident in making routines at home more manageable for my child						
	I feel comfortable about having visitors to our home						
	My child has fussy eating that makes it difficult to go away for a break						

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT, UNDERSTANDING AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
No	Item	1	2	3	4	5	
23	My child can concentrate on an activity for a short time						
24	My child can spontaneously begin communication with me						
25	My child spontaneously begins communication with other members of the family						
26	My child can request his/ her needs appropriately						
27	My child gets frustrated at not being understood						
28	My child can let me know when he/ she is hurt						
29	I know when my child feels poorly						
30	My child has repetitive behaviour and sensory interests that make it difficult to go on an outing						
31	My child is good at sharing with others						
32	My child has to have his/ her own way						
33	My child is aware of other people's needs						
34	My child gets invited to birthday parties						
35	My child plays with other children						
36	I have to go with my child to supervise play with other children						

## CHILD SYMPTOMS (FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOUR)

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
No	Item	1	2	3	4	5	
37	My child is happy						
38	My child is anxious						
39	My child is tolerant of mistakes						
40	My child is calm						
41	My child is angry						
42	My child is unpredictable						
43	My child can let me know what he/she is upset about						
44	My child understands appropriate behaviour in familiar social situations						
45	My child knows the difference between family members and strangers						
46	My child acts differently with family members compared with strangers						
47	My child is embarrassing when going out						
48	My child has repetitive behaviours that make day to day life impossible						

Leadbitter et al. (2018)

**Open Access** This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

## Appendix G

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview 1

- a. Assent and Warm Up (provide interview cards (pictures that say “stop”, “I need a break”, “restroom break”, “Yes” or “No” or “bathroom break”). This visual cues are provided with the intent of supporting the students during the interview.
  - a. The interviewer will review the interview cards with the to ensure they understand how to use them and feel comfortable.
- b. Activity-Based Component (See Introduction to Chess lesson plan Appendix L)
- c. We will take a break (5 – 10 minute) after the Activity-Based Component
- d. The interview will ask the questions from the consolidated question set (Me & My Teacher Questionnaire, Asset Based Protocol, Me at School Questionnaire)
- e. The interviewer will close out the interview by thanking the youth for their participation and answering any questions they have.

#### Interview 2

- a) Assent and Warm Up (provide interview cards (pictures that say “stop”, “I need a break”, “restroom break”, “Yes” or “No” or “bathroom break”). This visual cues are provided with the intent of supporting the students during the interview.
  - a. The interviewer will review the interview cards with the youth to ensure they understand how to use them and feel comfortable.
- b) Activity-Based Component (See Introduction to Chess lesson plan Appendix L)
- c) We will take a break (5 – 10 minute) after the Activity-Based Component
- d) The interview will ask the questions from the consolidated question set (Me & My Teacher Questionnaire, Asset Based Protocol, Me at School Questionnaire)
- e) The interviewer will close out the interview by thanking the youth for their participation and answering any questions they have.

#### Interview 3 (If Needed)

- a) Assent and Warm Up (provide interview cards (pictures that say “stop”, “I need a break”, “restroom break”, “Yes” or “No” or “bathroom break”). This visual cues are provided with the intent of supporting the students during the interview.
  - a. The interviewer will review the interview cards with the youth to ensure they understand how to use them and feel comfortable.
- b) Activity-Based Component (See Introduction to Chess lesson plan Appendix L)
- c) We will take a break (5 – 10 minute) after the Activity-Based Component
- d) The interview will ask the questions from the consolidated question set (Me & My Teacher Questionnaire, Asset Based Protocol, Me at School Questionnaire)
- e) The interviewer will close out the interview by thanking the youth for their participation and answering any questions they have.

## Appendix H

### My Teacher and Me Questionnaire

*So, [Child's Name], I want to know more about you and your teacher. I am going to ask you some questions about [Teacher's Name]. Show child the chart and point to each response as you say it. Remember, you can answer either "yes," "no," or "sometimes." Ready?*

	No	Sometimes	Yes
1. I like my teacher	0	1	2
2. My teacher and I like the same things.	0	1	2
3. I can ask my teacher for help.	0	1	2
4. I think my teacher is not fair to me.	0	1	2
5. If my teacher is busy, I can still go and get help from my teacher.	0	1	2
6. I try to make my teacher happy.	0	1	2
7. I get in trouble with my teacher a lot.	0	1	2
8. I don't like being away from my teacher.	0	1	2
9. I follow the rules at school.	0	1	2
10. My teacher likes me.	0	1	2
11. If my teacher is busy I can still get help from someone in class.	0	1	2
12. I get angry with my teacher.	0	1	2
13. I feel unhappy when my teacher spends time with other kids in the class.	0	1	2
14. My teacher listens to me.	0	1	2
15. When I'm having a bad day, my teacher helps me feel better.	0	1	2

Free Response (If child does not respond to first question, proceed with probe):

What do you like about your teacher?

---

---

---

If child does not provide response, ask:

Tell me what you like about your teacher:

---

---

---

**Appendix I**

**Asset-Based Questionnaire**

**Asset Based Questionnaire**

We are interested in learning more about what you are great at. So, I have a few questions that I want to ask you. Take your time answering.

“What do you like most about yourself”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

“What are you absolutely best at?”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

“What do you enjoy most?”

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **Appendix J**

### **Me at School Activity**

We are interested in how you see yourself at school. We would like you to make a representation (drawing or picture) of yourself that shows how you see yourself at school.

We want you to create something that we will call “This is ME AT SCHOOL”? It can be a drawing but It could also be a story, a poem, or a reflection. You can use pencils, crayons, markers or anything you would like to represent yourself.

Who are you at school? How do you feel at school?

Adapted from Goodall (2018)

## Appendix K

### Friendship and Disclosure Questions

#### FRIENDSHIPS

**Do you have friends, yes or no?**

If the participant says yes ask: «**how many friends do you have?**». If the participant is not able to answer verbally, use your fingers to count friends (I.e. «**Do you have one friend? Two friends...etc.**»)

**Do you have a best friend? A number one friend? A favorite friend?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Then ask «**Would you like to have more friends, yes or no?**».

Additional prompts:

\*If participant answered that he/she would like to have more friends ask: «**Why would you like to have more friends?, What would be better about having more friends?**»

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*If participant answered that he/she would not like to have more friends ask: “**Most of the time do like being alone**”

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Is it easy or hard for you to make friends?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have anyone at school to laugh with?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Additional prompts:

Instructions: Ask the participant «**What makes it hard (or easy) for you to make friends?**»

**\*DISCLOSURE:** Term “ASD” (*Adapted from Mogensen and Mason, 2015 as cited by Courchesne et al. 2022*)

In the case that youth themselves bring up the diagnosis, here are questions to go through:

1. How would you explain autism to someone who doesn't know what it means?

---

---

---

---

2. Can you tell me how you found out that you had autism (prompt: **who** told you?)

---

---

---

---

3. How did you feel? (*prompt*: Did you feel different? Were you relived, confused...?)

---

---

---

---

4. Do your friends know? (Prompt: do you tell other people?)

---

---

---

---

5. Have you met other people with autism?

---

---

---

---

\*If parents indicate that they have not disclosed their child's autism diagnosis to them do not include these questions.

Source: Adapted from Courchesne et al. (2022) Autism Voices Protocol Manual

## Appendix L

### Teacher Questions

1. What are three words you would use to describe the youth?
2. How long have you known the youth?
3. How long have you worked with the youth? If what capacity have you worked with them?
4. How much progress have they made during the time you have worked with them?
5. What do you believe is their greatest challenge?
6. Do you believe you have a good rapport with them?
7. What is something you enjoy about the student?
8. What are somethings you would want a future teacher (or professional) to know about the student?
9. What has been the most difficult part working with the student?
10. What has been the most rewarding part working with the student?
11. What is something the youth enjoys?
12. To your knowledge does the youth have any friends? Explain
13. Have you received any autism specific training? If so, explain.
14. Please provide your name and email address (this information will be used to email you the gift card)

## Appendix M

### Interview Cards

