

ABSTRACT

SMITH, WYNNE RANDY: A Case Study of Which Beliefs and Practices Foster Or Inhibit the Overidentification and Overrepresentation of Minority Students in Elementary Special Education Classes. (Under the direction of Dr. Matt Militello and Dr. Lance Fusarelli.)

The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs and practices teachers regularly employ within their classrooms that could lead to increased placement of minorities into alternative, special education settings. This qualitative study involves two elementary schools within a central North Carolina county, the administrative staff at both respective schools, school counselor(s) assigned to both schools, and the appropriate central office staff at the county level. Two schools have been selected as having the greatest percentage range of minorities in special education classes versus the least, purposefully chosen to determine if teachers' beliefs and practices at the two schools are so dissimilar as to be of significance in regards to student numbers in special education. This researcher is determined to glean positive strategies that may play a role in determining which strategies can be employed to possibly yield a greater degree of success within the classroom. An initial and a follow-up interview will be conducted with each teacher participant. Additionally, a classroom observation will be completed, recording the data on observation charts, and scripting, as well as recording field notes. The researcher will review lesson plans, maintaining a continuous dialogue vis-à-vis email before and after each observation, as well as follow up discussions. Classroom observations will take place at two central North Carolina elementary schools within the same county.

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A Case Study of Which Beliefs and Practices Foster or Inhibit the Overidentification and Overrepresentation of Minority Students in Elementary Special Education Classes

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation has been the culmination of untold hours of work, sacrifice, dedication, and excitement. No portion of this entire process would have been possible without the ceaseless support, devotion, and encouragement of my daughter Taryn Chalkis. She had been the driving support, keeping me focused on the importance of attaining my goal. Without her, my strength would not have been so sustained.

This is also dedicated to my dear mother, Barbara Smith, grandparents, Dr. Herbert and Pearl Kreisberg, as well as my aunt Sadie Miller, whose memories kept alive their hopes for me to strive to the greatest of my potential. I would lastly like to dedicate this dissertation to my dear canine and avian children whose unwavering love did and will keep me forever strong.

BIOGRAPHY

The author of this study was born on July 18, 1952 in Brooklyn, New York. The oldest of four children, Wynne was the daughter of artists, exposed to the New York art and theater scene from birth. She attended C.W. Post College (L.I.U.) in Brookville, New York, originally as a film and acting major, eventually changing majors to English Education. Her younger sister, Lisa, was born with an array of disabilities. Playing the role of a surrogate mother, this devotion turned into the eventual career of special educator. In 1974, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English Education, in 1994 a Masters of Education (special education from N.C. State), in 1998 a Masters of Education (special education from NCCU), and in 2003 a Masters in School Administration (N.C. State). She has retired from full time teaching but is still active in education on a part time basis.

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CHAPTER ONE

Overview of the Problem

Teachers put in a great deal of effort each day to successfully educate children. Nevertheless, disparities are still obvious between certain populations of students. As early as kindergarten, there is a noticeable differentiation that begins as a subtlety within the first documented “benchmark(s)” where children are compared with one another in “like” groupings. As time goes by, the divisions become more pronounced and are generally divisible along racial lines and thus, not coincidentally, along economic boundaries as well. Currently, low-SES (social economic status) minority children are being tested and placed at a higher degree into special programs classes in public schools than their higher-income, predominantly White counterparts.

Nationally, there is a relentless disquiet regarding the soaring percentage of minority children tracked into special education programs. There are four incidences (mild mental handicaps [formerly mild mental retardation], specific learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and speech and language disabilities) in which high minority representation including African American, American Indian, and Hispanic occur. Of the 13 major special education disability categories to be defined in chapter one, these four are considered “judgmental,” as they may not have a medical component ascribed to their diagnosis (Gelb & Mizokawa, 1986; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). Taking the aforementioned into account, questions still remain. If a child enters a school environment without the supplemental

enrichment of his/her White counterpart, will he/she not perform as expected, sending that child into the special education cauldron of doom?

Background of the Study

The disproportionate representation of minority students in high-incidence, special-education populations (mild mentally handicapped, learning disabled, and emotional/behavioral disorders) has been a concern for over three decades (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Dunn, 1968). From the enactment of PL 94-142 requiring states to provide free and appropriate education to all students with disabilities, children in some racial/ethnic groups have been identified for services in disproportionately large numbers. Occasionally, public apprehension is provoked by such patterns of disproportionality.

Within the low-incidence categories (deaf, blind, orthopedic impairment, etc.) in which the problem is observable outside of the school context and is typically diagnosed by medical professionals, no marked disproportion exists. The higher representation of minority students occurs in the high-incidence categories of mild mental retardation (MMR), emotional disturbance (ED), and, to a lesser extent, learning disabilities (LD), where the problem is frequently identified primarily in the school context and the disability diagnosis is typically specified without substantiation of an organic cause.

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, reauthorized in 2004, entitles all individuals with disabilities to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and

mandates nondiscriminatory assessment, identification, and placement of children with disabilities. Children are not to be identified as disabled because of poor achievement due to environmental disadvantage or ethnic, linguistic, or racial difference. This is made unambiguous by the prescribed evaluation procedures and the definitions of disability conditions in IDEA. However, nationally, some minority groups continue to be overrepresented as disabled, particularly as mildly mentally retarded (MMR) and seriously emotionally disturbed (SED). State and local representation rates vary widely, but in many cases show even more marked patterns of overrepresentation.

In 1998, approximately 1.5 million minority children were identified as having mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or a specific learning disability. More than 876,000 of those individuals were either African or Native American and had a significantly higher probability of being identified as disabled. As of 2004, the numbers had climbed to over 2.73 million, with 8.71% Caucasian, 8.21% Hispanic, 12.56% Native American/Pacific Islander, and 12.42% African American out of the general population of students within their individual racial constituent (www.IDEAdata.org). Once identified, there is a greater likelihood of removal from the general population and placement in a more restrictive setting.

Overrepresentation occurs where the amount of any ethnic/gender delineation of a group within a disability label is in direct statistical disproportion to their group in the general population. From a legal perspective, substantiation of disproportionate

representation has been adequate to commence a legal or policy action to diminish disproportionality. Racial and ethnic minorities are protected from discrimination in the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1974, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The overrepresentation of ethnic and linguistic minorities in special education has resulted in several well-known court cases. Yet, findings have been mixed in some instances where allegations of discrimination were based on overrepresentation. The court, in such cases, did not find that reducing disproportionate representation is the appropriate solution to assure equal educational opportunity for minority students. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.

Overrepresentation of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in programs for students with MMR (mental retardation) has been the source of legal action in a number of court cases, including *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970) and *Guadalupe Organization v. Tempe Elementary Schools District No. 3* (1972). The complaints were about the administration of English language IQ tests to students who were LEP, about due process procedural safeguards, and about the training of evaluators and special educators. Rulings in these cases required evaluators to test in the primary language, to use a multiplicity of measures (including nonverbal and adaptive behavior instruments), and to employ additional due process procedural safeguards.

The case of *Larry P. v. Riles* (1972, 1979, 1984, 1986) in California is most likely the

best-known challenge to disproportionate representation. The result of this case was to declare the disproportionate representation of African-American students in programs for students with mild mental retardation discriminatory, to prohibit the use of IQ tests with African-American students, and to eliminate the overrepresentation of African-American students in Educable Mental Retardation (EMR) programs.

However, in 1980, courts ruled in *PASE et al. v. Hannon* that IQ test bias was not a noteworthy issue in the assessment process and that the observed overrepresentation was not discriminatory. In *Marshall et al. v. Georgia* (1984, 1985) and *S-1 v. Turlington* (1986), overrepresentation of African-American students in EMR programs was at issue, but overrepresentation was not found to be satisfactory evidence of differential treatment of individuals who are African American.

While disproportionality may indicate the need to investigate, features of educational programs and procedures were the focus of the rulings. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, federal policy was to treat the existence of disproportionality as evidence of potential discrimination. The overarching results definitively display consistency, leaning towards case-by-case subjectivity. As a result, there is not uniformity in approaching such a question of equality/inequality in the placement of minority students within special education programs. Through the U.S. Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the ethnic representation of students in special education at the state and local educational level has been monitored every two years. Where overrepresentation is found to exist, OCR has required school systems to

implement corrective plans to reduce this disproportionality.

Federal concern about the educational experience of minority students in special education was apparent when IDEA was amended in 1991 and 1997. In 1991, IDEA (P. L. 101-476) cited a compelling need to achieve greater success in the education of minority children with disabilities. The most recent amendments to IDEA (P. L. 105-17) reiterate that concern: (a) greater efforts are needed to prevent the intensification of problems connected with mislabeling and high dropout rates among minority children with disabilities; (b) more minority children continue to be served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of minority students in the general school population; (c) poor African-American children are 2.3 times more likely to be identified by their teacher as having mental retardation than their White counterparts; (d) although African Americans represent 16% of elementary and secondary enrollments, they constitute 21% of total enrollments in special education; (e) the dropout rate is 68% higher for minorities than for Whites; and (f) more than 50% of minority students in large cities drop out of school (Section 601 (c)(8)).

The 1997 amendments for IDEA (P. L. 105-17) also added the requirement to collect data for the purpose of monitoring and reducing disproportionality (Section 674). Congress found the need to be particularly urgent because the number of children from diverse backgrounds in the nation's schools is increasing steadily. As of 2000, one in three children are African American, Hispanic, Asian American, or American Indian. Children of color now comprise more than 75% of the enrollment in many large, urban school systems, and White

students have become a minority in many more.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, federal policy had been to treat the existence of disproportionality as evidence of potential discrimination. Much of the attention to disproportionate representation over the past three decades had been prompted by judicial and legislative mandates. Recent history also includes, however, examples of proactive policy initiatives to understand and address the problem.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) convened policy forums in 1993 and 1994 to promote a constructive national dialogue about the disproportionate participation of ethnic and cultural minorities in special education. They produced a synthesis in 1995, bringing together the forum's major themes and action plans, and established a continuing collaborative role between states and the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs. Some of the strategies for preventing and correcting disproportionality resembled those advanced by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Panel, which conducted a comprehensive review in the early 1980s. Both the NAS and NASDSE initiatives called for improvements in the referral and assessment process and an emphasis on the quality of the educational experience. Other recommendations by NASDSE focused on increasing parental involvement, using community resources differently, and recruiting more teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Table 1.1 displays numbers of school-aged students labeled and receiving services specific to their exceptionalities, as of the fall of 2007, irrespective of their race or gender.

Table 1.2 displays that same data in percentages and shows that in North Carolina, 35.46% of the children served under IDEA are Black (not Hispanic), compared with only 20.59% in the 50 states plus DC. In contrast, the percentages of White children served under IDEA are comparable between the two areas (54.59% in NC versus 57.50% in the 50 states plus DC), and Hispanic children are underrepresented in NC (7.24%) versus in the 50 states plus DC (18.06%).

According to Kunjufu (2004), Black children comprise 17% of the 41% of children placed in special education programs in public schools. Furthermore, 85% of those Black children were male (Kunjufu, 2004), and of the Black students recommended for special education, 92% were assessed and 73% were placed in special education programs (Kunjufu, 2005). Knotek found the same results in a 2003 study where minority students continued to be represented in larger numbers in special education than was the general population.

A great deal of research in the United States involving ethnic minorities employs a "deficit model" that assumes the normality of the mainstream dominant culture and views minority group variations as aberrations (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Prevailing research commonly assumes homogeneity among ethnic group members, ignoring patterns of specific cultural adaptation, and fails to link unique cultural and environmental experiences to social functioning (Coutinho & Oswald, 1998; Rogoff & Morelli, 1989; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Wertsch, 1985).

The employment of the deficit model has caused ethnic minorities to be consistently

misidentified, misassessed, misdiagnosed, and misplaced in special education (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Obiakor, 1992). This notion perpetrates the beliefs held by the majority of White teachers that an exhibition of any behaviors are not of a cultural nature but indicate incapacity.

Aggressive behavior is the most common presenting problem among children classified as emotionally disturbed (ED) or behaviorally disordered (BD). Current data indicate that the incidence of antisocial, aggressive behavior is on the rise (Etscheidt, 1991; APA, 1993). Since attention to aggressiveness is fundamental to the processes by which many at-risk students are identified and retained, an improved understanding of cultural variations regarding aggressiveness in distinct contexts is needed to improve these processes.

Unfortunately, differentiating between cultural and social influences can be difficult, in part because the unique cultures of ethnic minority groups and their influence on individual behaviors have not been studied sufficiently to be understood (APA, 1993; Barth, 1969; Coutinho & Oswald, 1998; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelney, & Pardo, 1992). Rotheram-Borus and Phinney (1990) suggested that, although social expectations among children of different ethnic groups have not been studied sufficiently, there is some evidence of differences in children's behavior due to their ethnicity. They cite Kochman (1981), who found that African-American children employ different communication codes because they are more actively and openly expressive than Euro-American children. Communication codes are identifiable structures of communicative conduct that help define and enhance the

expression of membership in a discrete community (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993).

Therefore, communication codes provide a valid means for comparing ethnic groups.

Ethnic identification is an important consideration when examining culturally specific styles of communication and aggression because ethnic groups embody distinctive historical and current circumstances producing differences in behavior (Rogoff, 1990). Ethnic and racial identification implies a consciousness of self within a particular group and is indicative of a particularized selfconsciousness. Racial pride functions to bolster self-respect and to reinforce self-concept (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). A student exhibiting a unique style of communication that is perceived as aggressive could be misidentified as BD/ED by culturally ignorant teachers lacking in an understanding of the distinct communication styles of the ethnic minority student.

Unfortunately, the current labeling guidelines utilized to identify and assess a student as ED lack any consistent consideration of ethnicity and cultural identity (Feil, Walker, Severson, & Ball, 2000). This disregards data that indicate the existence of a set of cultural role behaviors, including language codes, that allow the individual certain prerogatives and prescribe a sequence of culturally defined responses from the group (Coutinho & Oswald, 1998; Kennedy, 1988).

Findings of discrete, seemingly aggressive communication codes among African-American participants contribute to data that indicate that some minority children and youth communicate differently and are at risk due in part to a unique style of communication. This

perpetrates the continued need for more of a cultural connection between teacher and student.

Table 1.1 Children Receiving Services by Number, Fall 2007					
State	All disabilities	Specific learning disabilities	Speech or language impairments	Mental retardation	ED
North Carolina	9,025	3,466	X	2,782	452
50 states and DC (including BIE schools)	330,975	148,563	5,924	71,252	29,829
US and outlying areas	335,311	150,792	6,001	72,679	29,888

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, DataAnalysis System (DANS),OMB #18200043: "Children with Disabilities Receiving Special Education Under Part B of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," 2007. Data updated as of July 15, 2008.

Table 1.2 Children Ages 6 through 21 Served Under IDEA, Part B, in All Educational Environments						
By Race/Ethnicity and State: Fall 2007						
Percentage of Race/Ethnicity Total						
State	American Indian/ Alaska Native (%)	Asian/ Pacific Islander (%)	Black (not Hispanic) (%)	Hispanic (%)	White (not Hispanic) (%)	Race/ethnicity total (%)
North Carolina	1.76	0.95	35.46	7.24	54.59	100.00
50 states and DC (including BIE schools)	1.55	2.30	20.59	18.06	57.50	100.00
US and outlying areas	1.52	2.33	20.28	19.29	56.58	100.00

Purpose of the Study

The disparity found within racial placements is not only a national crisis, as seen in the tables above, but one indigenous to our safe and, seemingly impervious, local environs. The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs and practices teachers regularly employ within their classrooms that could affect increased placement of minorities into alternative, special education settings. This qualitative study involves regular and special education teachers at two elementary schools within a central North Carolina county, the administrative staff at respective schools, school counselor(s) assigned to both schools, and the appropriate central office staff at the county level. The two schools have been picked as having the greatest percentage range of minorities in special education classes versus the least,

purposefully chosen to determine if teachers' beliefs and practices at the two schools are so dissimilar as to account for that difference. The researcher is determined to glean positive strategies that may play a role in determining which strategies can be employed to possibly yield a greater degree of success within the classroom and reduce disproportionality. An initial and follow-up interview will be conducted with each teacher participant. Additionally, a classroom observation will be completed, with the data being recorded through observation charts, scripting, and field notes. The researcher will review lesson plans, maintaining a continuous dialogue vis-à-vis email before and after each observation, as well as conduct follow-up discussions. Classroom observations will take place at two central North Carolina elementary schools within the same county.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding the study is: What fosters or inhibits the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special education classes?

In addition, the following subquestions will be explored:

1. What is your school's policy (practice) on initially requesting identifying/testing a particular child? Is there any set of particular "written" policy?
2. What role do teachers, school counselors, and school administrators' beliefs and practices play in the identification and referral of students for special education services?

3. What role does each of these participants play in recommending or assigning students to special education?

Benefits of the Study

The primary benefit that will be gained through this study will be broadening relevant information that will be helpful in assisting classroom teachers who have not realized the importance of not only what they must teach but how they must teach it, setting aside their individual presumptive notions of what the students should be able to do at any point in time. Additionally, this study should allow for collegial discussion, which may help lead to overall program improvements in teacher preparation.

Disparities are still obvious between certain populations of students. As early as kindergarten, there is a noticeable differentiation that begins as a subtlety within the first documented “benchmark(s)” where children are compared with one another in “like” groupings. As time goes by, the divisions become more pronounced and are generally divisible along racial lines and thus, not coincidentally, along economic boundaries as well. Currently, low-SES (social economic status) minority children are being tested and placed at a higher degree into special programs classes in public schools than their higher-income, predominantly White counterparts.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Although there is extensive documentation of minority overrepresentation in special education, knowledge of the factors that have created the context within which disproportionality occurs is limited. Teachers have their individualized perspectives on urban education, special education, available and needed resources, and the specific topics of diversity and disproportionality. A number of clear themes emerge. Teachers and schools feel unprepared to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students. Classroom behavior appears to be an especially challenging issue for many teachers, and cultural gaps and misunderstandings may intensify behavioral challenges. Many teachers perceive special education as the only resource available for helping students who are not succeeding. There is a need to discuss the complex issues of race. These challenges truly paint a surprisingly complex picture of the factors that may cause and maintain minority disproportionality in special education. It suggests that successful remediation efforts would avoid simplistic or linear solutions, increase resources to address learning and behavior problems in general education, and seek methods to use data on racial disparity as a stimulus toward reflection and action, supporting the need for greater research in this area.

Introduction

For the past 30 years, there has been great concern regarding the disproportional overrepresentation of children from three racial/ethnic minority groups—African American, American Indian, and Hispanic—across four high-incidence special education disability categories. These categories are mild mental retardation, specific learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and speech and language impairments. Of the 13 major special education disability categories, these four are considered “judgmental” because there may not be any medical component ascribed to their diagnosis (Gelb & Mizokawa, 1986, p. 549; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998, p. 15). Evidence of overrepresentation occurs when there is a disproportionate percentage of any one ethnic group within a specific disability in proportion to that group’s representation in the overall population.

As a child from a deprived environment enters school, he or she may be ill equipped to achieve any degree of success. In the struggle to keep up with classmates who are exposed to rudimentary rungs in the accepted learning process, these children inevitably fall behind. Once the process begins, the child is noted as one to watch. As lessons progress and the child is not keeping pace with the other children, the teacher begins the process of referral to the SST Committee (school service team that determines eligibility for possible further testing).

A series of publications by MacMillan, Gresham, Siperstein, and Bocian (1996) investigated the congruence between school-identified students and state-specific education codes (as they vary from state to state). These studies examined referrals made by regular

education teachers for “prereferral intervention.” Once the children were given a battery of assessments and their teachers completed rating scales on their social skills, problem behaviors, and academic skills, these children were monitored to determine how the schools dealt with them and how they were qualified as eligible for special education. The findings revealed very low levels of adherence by the schools to their state education code criteria in classifying students.

Additional contributing factors that are related to the special education process and educational services in general were the following:

1. Misdiagnosis of the child during the referral;
2. Use of the wait-to-fail model before seeking specialized services;
3. Cultural bias occurring at various points in the individual and contextual assessment procedure, particularly the use of culturally biased instruments and lack of culturally appropriate interpretations;
4. Limited meaningful participation of minority parents in the required individual educational planning (IEP) process;
5. Lack of information about the effectiveness of the resulting special education programs or services, coupled with concerns about “dead-end” placements;
6. General educational reforms requiring more accountability, such as high-stakes testing and the omission of special education student scores from school-wide analysis; and

7. Lack of either assistance or consequences to school districts experiencing overrepresentation of minority students (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998).

Initially in the school setting, the teacher is the first to take notice of a child's need/differentiation from the class norm and thus refers to the SST committee within the school to request testing if interventions within the regular class are unsuccessful. Once the results are determined, all concerned stakeholders convene to make the eligibility decision for the child, based on a variety of assessment information. The proportion of a racial/ethnic group who are determined eligible for special education in any 1 of the following 13 recognized disability categories usually measures the fairness of its representation.

1. Specific learning disability,
2. Speech and language impaired,
3. Mental retardation,
4. Emotionally disturbed,
5. Multiple disabilities,
6. Hearing impaired,
7. Orthopedic impairments,
8. Other health impairments,
9. Visual impairments,
10. Autism,
11. Deaf and blind,

12. Traumatic brain injury, and

13. Developmentally delayed.

For this second component of the analysis, the percentage of minorities in the general population (children aged 6-21) was compared to the percentage of minorities in each of the 13 special education categories (usny.nysed.gov/disa/specialed.html). Based upon research (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998), it has been hypothesized that some categories of special education would be more discrepant than others (specifically learning disabilities, educationally mentally handicapped, and emotionally disturbed). MacMillan and Reschly's research determined that previous studies indicated that the most pronounced discrepancies tended to occur in the areas of special education that allowed for the greatest subjective diagnostic criteria, referring to these as the "softer or judgmental disabilities," as they require a higher degree of interpretation and clinical judgment than categories such as visual impairment or orthopedic impairments (specifically learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and mental retardation). The causal hypothesis is that the proportion of different racial/ethnic groups in any single disability category should be approximately equal to the proportion of that group within the general school population. If the proportion of a racial/ethnic group in any disability category surpasses the proportion of that group in the school population, at the local district, state, or national level, then it suggests that this overrepresentation is the result of discrimination.

Of significant importance is that ethnic proportions in the more clearly biologically

determined disability categories, such as deafness, blindness, or orthopedic, and in severe and profound mental retardation do not display dramatic deviations from the expected proportions across the nationally reported state-level data. In fact, in these nine low-incidence categories, less judgmental and more medical criteria are required for ethnic/racial grouping where no meaningful difference exists. To obtain a greater in-depth understanding of disproportionate representation, an extensive review of the literature was conducted. Articles were identified through computer searches, library research, and discussions with experts in the discipline. In conducting the review of the literature associated with the issue of the disproportionate representation of minority children in special education, the researcher discovered an extensive body of research on this problem (Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Salend, Garrick Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002).

Public concern in regards to preventing the potential harm to a child misidentified or served inappropriately is evident in many public documents including the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the procedures for evaluating children suspected of a disability under IDEA, the data collection and monitoring responsibilities of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and court decisions spanning more than 20 years. The 1997 IDEA special education legislation, which is replete with procedural safeguards to protect against overrepresentation, summarizes the problems as: "a) disproportionate representation of children from diverse backgrounds in special education, b) over identification of poor African American students as

mentally retarded, c) unacceptable high drop out rates for minority children in special education, and d) lack of appropriate services to students of limited English proficiency” (<http://www.fape.org/idea/2004/summary.htm>).

Since Dunn’s (1968) influential article on the overrepresentation of minorities in special education, the crisis has been well documented in the empirical literature. Unfortunately, many of the same troubling issues identified over 30 years ago are nevertheless widespread throughout all levels of the educational system. In fact, with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997), federal lawmakers called for data collection and reporting on race and ethnicity in relation to disability in order to greater appreciate the problem (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). On the state and local level, school districts are being held accountable for decreasing the number of minorities in special education, yet there is no cogent solution. Salend, Garrick Duhaney, and Montgomery (2002) called for a comprehensive approach involving many stakeholders, to address the issue of disproportionate representation. Although the disproportionate representation of minorities has drawn enormous attention in the field of educational research, studies of successful organizational reform and practices that reduce the overrepresentation of minorities seem to be lacking in the literature. Multiple factors have been cited for the ongoing quandary of minority overrepresentation in special education.

Coutinho and Oswald (2000) integrated historical perspectives in “Disproportionate Representation in Special Education: A Synthesis and Recommendations.” They conveyed

definitions of disproportionate representation, along with explanations of how figures are interpreted, and presented a conceptual framework that addresses the issue. The authors called for an accurate representation of data, since several methods had been or are being used to calculate the number of minorities in special education. In their conceptual framework, they recommended future research regarding two hypotheses: “ethnic groups are differentially susceptible to educational disability and special education referral, assessment, and eligibility rely on processes and instruments that are culturally and linguistically loaded and that measure and interpret the ability, achievement, and behavior of students differently across ethnic groups” (p. 147).

In order to address their hypotheses, Coutinho and Oswald advocated further research on variables that would tend to predict minority-student classification, such as demographics, social, economic, and educational factors. They referred to the requirement for empirically and ethically based understanding in order to assist improved achievement of minority students.

To better reduce teacher subjectivity and bias of behavior rating scales, Hosp and Hosp (2001) recommended a more comprehensive approach in assessing student behavior. They proposed that schools use various individuals when rating and observing behaviors. They additionally stressed the importance of prior planning for multiple observations at several times in the day, targeting observable behaviors, ensuring that they are measurable, and comparing the child being observed to other children.

In “Overrepresentation of Minority Students in Special Education: A Continuing Debate,” Artiles and Trent (1994) observed the same underlying issues that roughly 25 years earlier were reviewed in educational research by Dunn (1968) and Deno (1970). Although they considered this prior work germane, they recommended reexamining the problems from a wide-ranging perspective to better understand why overrepresentation continues to exist.

Artiles and Trent asserted that such factors as the labeling process, homogeneous grouping, efficacy studies, and the quality of general education are not sufficient to explain the continuing problem of minority overrepresentation in special education. They propose viewing the problem of overrepresentation from a sociohistorical and political perspective and implementing a comprehensive reform agenda. Such changes include concept refinement regarding the definition of disability, a culturally sensitive research agenda, systemic reform of special education, personnel preparation reform through multicultural education opportunities, and advocacy and policy-making.

Farkas (2003) reviewed the minority overrepresentation research in “Racial Disparities and Discrimination in Education.” Farkas directed his attention to the Black-White achievement gap and stated, “It has been estimated that at least half, and probably more, of the Black-White gap in 12th-grade academic achievement would be eliminated if we could eliminate the performance gap at school entry” (p. 1119). He proposed four explanations for the racial disparity that included the lack of appropriate instruction, insufficient focus in school and at home, insufficient skills, and lack of instruction during the

summer.

Advocating that teachers and administrator must be monitored for signs of prejudice, Farkas stressed the need to collect and analyze multiple data sets from districts and supplement them with surveys in hopes to understand the root cause of the discrimination. He also called for an increase in experimental studies of school-based interventions that concentrate on the reduction in racial disparities.

Hosp and Reschly (2003) synthesized the results of 10 studies in “Referral Rates for Intervention of Assessment: A Meta-Analysis of Racial Differences.” The authors focused on referral rates for intervention or assessment of Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic students, noting that referrals are one of the most important predictors of future special-education services. Hosp and Reschly analyzed the use of multiple factors affecting minority overrepresentation, using special-education methods of calculating disproportionate representation, with the stipulation that they were misleading, and the use of national databases, citing that their reliability and validity were questionable.

The authors hypothesized that African-American student referral rates would be higher than for Caucasian and Hispanic students. After a preliminary search discovered 1,500 citations, 121 studies were collected. Only 10 studies were usable, yielding 44 comparisons. A coding system was then developed, and studies were coded twice. A meta-analysis was completed as a follow-up. Results indicated that African-American and Hispanic students were referred at a greater rate than Caucasians and that more African-Americans but few

Caucasians met special-education eligibility requirements.

Hosp and Reschly explored possible reasons for the racial disparity in referral and special-education classification rates. Their explanations were analogous to other research findings in citing low achievement, disruptive behavior, teacher perceptions, and confirmatory bias as reasons for referral. As their study was limited in the number of districts represented, Hosp and Reschly suggested the inclusion of population frequencies was a standard in reporting on referrals. They called for developing a national database that includes frequencies of referral and population for different racial groups and would disaggregate data at all levels. Finally, Hosp and Reschly added that other variables should be studied relative to the disproportionate representation issue.

Ferguson (2003) reviewed definitions of racial bias and the deficiencies in adequate research, as noted in “Teachers’ Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap.” He examined the controversial but common assumption that teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes” (p. 461). Ferguson’s hypothesis of teacher bias was based on the assertion that educators were conditioned to believe certain characteristics about Blacks and Whites, thereby affecting their perceptions and expectations.

Ferguson (2003) cited studies that show evidence of teacher accuracy when predicting rank of students’ future performance. He attributed this to numerous possibilities: teacher perceptions and expectations may be inflexible, few students may exert effort in changing

positions, and teaching style may prohibit children who most need catching up (p. 465).

Ferguson (2003) was critical of systemic underestimation of students' potential: "It is a major waste of human potential and a social injustice that we do not give teachers the incentives and supports they need to set, believe in, and skillfully pursue higher goals for all students, but especially for African Americans and other stigmatized minorities" (p. 468).

He asserted that responsive teaching was highly effective. He recapitulated the impact of the Great Expectations (GE) initiative in Oklahoma schools. Ferguson highlighted how two teachers' defeatism regarding student performance had evolved into high energy and expectations. As teacher expectations increased in the classroom, there were fewer behavior problems and absenteeism and increased achievement and family involvement. Ferguson stated that the secret to the program's triumph was the professional development the teachers received.

The above research documented multiple factors as contributing to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The empirical literature consistently spoke of reexamining the referral interventions and the referral process, as these almost inevitably led to assignment to special education. Demographic predictors and misunderstandings of cultural differences have also been cited as contributing to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. Views regarding racial discrimination on the part of administrators and educators were conflicting. Unfortunately, few experimental studies have been conducted to examine the effect of comprehensive reform in special

education. In his discussion of the achievement disparity, Ferguson (2003) stated, “We need more research on how professional development programs affect both test score levels and the Black-White score gap” (p. 495).

Another solution, proposed by Serna and Nielson (1998), is academic and social competence interventions. Such interventions included improving instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners (those with learning problems and those who are gifted) and teaching social/resiliency/self-determination skills to students. Most important, they emphasize the need for more quantitative studies that include researchers and participants from diverse backgrounds. In stressing the need for systemic change in schools to address the overrepresentation of minorities in “Intervention Versus Affirmation: Proposed Solutions to the Problem of Disproportionate Minority Representation in Special Education” (1998), they proposed that taking a proactive approach by utilizing early detection and primary-prevention strategies in classrooms would be a positive step in addressing the problem.

Generalizations about the effects of poverty on parenting may also generate unwarranted assumptions about families from groups overrepresented in special education. Although poverty has been shown to be associated with more negative parenting styles (McLloyd, 1998), there has been no evidence that African-American families were, on average, more dysfunctional than other families. Yet, in their recent ethnographic study of racial disproportionality in special education, Harry and Klingner (2006) and Harry, Klingner, and Hart (2005) found negative beliefs about African-American families to be

pervasive among educators.

Families of African-American students were described as neglectful, incompetent, and dysfunctional, despite the absence of any firsthand knowledge of those families' actual circumstances. Such descriptions also ignore significant cultural strengths in African-American communities, such as the involvement and expertise of extra familial adults who may act as protectors despite economic disadvantage (Harry & Klingner, 2006; King, 2005).

As a consequence, a variety of poverty-associated risk factors had been shown to foretell academic and behavioral gaps that might be expected to be the forerunner of special education referral, suggesting that economic disadvantages make some contribution to minority disproportionality in special education. Yet the path from initial referral to eligibility determination is multifaceted, and such research has not supported the hypothesis that poverty is the sole or even a primary cause of racial and ethnic disparities in special education. In particular, although poverty creates conditions that reduce parenting effectiveness, assumptions made about the general quality of African-American families and their contributions to dissimilar rates of special education referral are unwarranted given the scope of existing data.

Finally, regardless of the relationship among poverty, academic achievement, and racial disparities, mechanisms for the destructive effects of poverty remain unclear. It is often presumed that economic disadvantage affects educational readiness by increasing biological or family-based risk prior to school entry. Yet students placed at risk for the biological or

social effects of poverty are also more likely to attend schools with reduced educational resources and fewer opportunities for quality instruction (McLloyd, 1998; Peske & Haycock, 2006). In an educational system in which poor students of color routinely receive an inferior education, the possible contributions of the schooling itself to disparities in special-education services must also be considered.

One of the most consistent findings in educational research is that students achieve in direct proportion to their opportunity to learn (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). It might well be expected that students whose educational opportunities were limited will be more likely to be referred for special-education services (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry, 1994).

Differential access to educational resources has been consistently demonstrated for some minority groups in a number of areas (Kozol, 2005; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Of the possible links between general-education practices and special-education disproportionality, however, only the proportion of culturally sentient teachers in the teaching force had been directly investigated. Serwatka, Deering, and Grant (1995) found that as the percentage of African-American teachers increased, overrepresentation of African-American students in the emotionally disturbed category decreased. Similarly, in a cross-state comparison, Lander and Hammons (2001) discovered that the discrepancy of African-American and White rates of eligibility for special education rose in direct proportion to the percentage of the teaching force that was White, especially in districts with a White percentage of more than 60%. Generally, inequity in the quality and quantity of educational resources had been extensively

documented. Curricula and instructional presentation appeared to perform a disservice for working-class students or students of color (Ferri & Connor, 2005, Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Serious deficiencies in physical facilities and resources in urban schools have been documented (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Oakes, Ormseth, Bell, & Camp, 1990). Such resource disparities may have their origin in inequitable school funding formulas (Rebeli, 1999) or in historical patterns of segregation and re-segregation (Katznelson, 2005; Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

Finally, a number of factors, ranging from inadequate teacher preparation (Barton, 2003), to teacher inexperience (Peske & Haycock, 2006), to teacher reticence to teach in what were perceived to be challenging areas, may limit the access of students in high-poverty, high-minority districts to quality teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Students from poverty backgrounds and students of color are also more likely to be taught by teachers with less experience and expertise, in worse-funded schools that had difficulty recruiting and maintaining both teachers of color in particular and a sufficient teaching force in general (Barton, 2003; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

Research in special education falls into two broad categories: empirical and conceptual. First, I will review significant special-education legislation and litigation. This is then followed by its application in practice within the classroom and how adjustments to the law are needed through verse, training, and practice. The following table features legal paradigm shifts in the evolution of special education.

Table 2.1 Noteworthy Transformations in the Evolution of Special Education

<u>Special Education Milestones: Selected Legislation and Litigation</u>
1965 – Elementary and Secondary Education Act – ESEA: Major federal education law became statutory basis for early legislation on students.
1970 – ESEA Amendments: Education of the Handicapped Act established as Title VI of ESE.
1971–<i>Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</i> U.S. Dist. Ct.E.Dist. Pennsylvania: Students with disabilities entitled to free public education program in least restrictive environment.
1972 – <i>Mills v. Board of Education</i> U.S. Dist. Ct. Dist. of Columbia: Services must be provided regardless of district’s ability to pay.
1974 – Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Federal law protecting rights of persons with disabilities. Section 504 of the Act protects against discrimination on the basis of disability status. In 1998, the law was included as a separate title in the Workforce Investment Act.
1974 – Education Amendments of 1974: First to mention appropriate education for all children with disabilities.
1975 – Education for All Handicapped Children Act – EHA: Reauthorization of EHA, becomes a stand-alone law and basis for federal funding of special education. Introduces key concepts: right to a free appropriate public education; every disabled student to receive an individualized education program (IEP); disabled students taught in the least restrictive environment.
1982 – <i>Board of Ed. Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley</i> U.S. Supreme Court: First Supreme Court decision on special education.
1983 – EHA Amended
1983 – <i>Brookhart v. Illinois. State Board of Education</i> U.S. 7th Circuit Ct.: Right to earn a high school diploma despite failing state test.
1986 – EHA Amended 1972 – <i>Mills v. Board of Education</i> U.S. Dist. Ct., Dist. of Columbia: Services must be provided regardless of district’s ability to pay.
1988 – <i>Honig v. Doe</i> U.S. Supreme Court: Children protected from expulsion for misbehavior resulting from their handicaps.
1990 – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA: Reauthorization of EHA, confirms and enlarges the scope of the 1975 legislation.
1993 – <i>Florence County School District Four v. Carter</i> U.S. Supreme Court: Parents entitled to reimbursement for private placement if public school fails to provide appropriate education.
1997 – IDEA Reauthorized
1999 – <i>Cedar Rapids v. Garret F.</i> U.S. Supreme Court: Children entitled to related services if essential to attending school.
2004 – IDEA Reauthorized
2005 – <i>Schaffer v. Weast</i> U.S. Supreme Court: Party challenging an IEP must prove its case.
2006 – <i>Arlington Central School District v. Murphy</i> U.S. Supreme Court: Parents who win a dispute over IEP not entitled to recoup monies spent on expert.

Table 2.2 Selected Research Giving Foundation to this Study What Others Have Done: Timeline of Research: Empirical/Conceptual

Study	Research Questions	Type of Design	Findings
Chickering, W. & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles of good practice.	How effective are your undergraduate courses?	Empirical, qualitative, 35-item questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of under graduate courses: a self-assessment	Enabled professors to fine tune and develop a greater degree of learning in the future using the framework.
Cooper, A., Beare, P. & Thorman, J. (1990).	How are candidates' attitudes influenced by cross-cultural experiences?	Empirical, qualitative, MN group immersed in Hispanic culture with only general training in multicultural education. Texas group given more cultural exposure/training. ¹⁸ Texas student teachers and 85 MN student teachers administered Lickert-type attitude assessment scale. Quasi-experimental study.	Texas teachers were more comfortable discussing racial issues and understanding different points of view/ visited student homes.
Deering, T.E. & Stanutz, A. (1995)	What are school districts and teacher education programs doing to enhance cultural sensitivity among teachers and how successful are these attempts?	Empirical, qualitative survey inventory: 16 secondary teacher candidates given an administered questionnaire regarding culturally diverse inventory awareness prior to and at the end of a ten week urban field trip.	The field experience did not significantly raise awareness and sensitivity of the participants.
Hadaway, N. C. & Flores, V. (1987-1988)	Do candidates have relevant experiences in multicultural settings, value multicultural training, and have a willingness to participate in such training?	Empirical, qualitative, candidates who had limited experiences with those from cultures different than their own took a survey questionnaire involving 125 candidates responding to the survey.	Felt unprepared and became very desirous of more multicultural training.
Howard, T.C. (2002).	What effects do the teaching practices and learning environments within urban contexts have on children?	Empirical, qualitative, case study that examined African American elementary and secondary students' descriptions of teaching practices and learning environments within urban contexts.	Identified three central teaching strategies that had a positive affect on student effort, engagement in class content and overall achievement. The three key strategies described in the findings: (a) teachers who establish family, community, home-like characteristics; (b) teachers who establish culturally connected caring relationships with students; and (c) the use of certain types of verbal communication and affirmation.
McDiarmid, J.W (1992)	To what extent does a series of multi-cultural service training sessions impact candidates' thinking and understanding of cultural diversity?	Empirical, qualitative, 110 trainees given a 306-item questionnaire at the beginning of their program (end of first year teaching and beginning of second year. 12 randomly selected teachers interviewed/ observed in their classrooms. Interviewees responded to vignettes regarding multicultural teaching.	Training did not reduce stereotypes and acceptance of discrepancies in assignments given to students based on race or ethnicity.

Table 2.2 Continued

Oswald, D. P., Coutinho, M. J., & Best, A. M. (2002).	This study investigated factors related to placement in special education for males and females. The conceptual approach included individual, family, and school characteristics believed to influence educational performance and outcomes.	Empirical, qualitative, the base year sample recruited using a two-stage stratified probability design creating a nationally representative sample of 8th grade schools and students First stage:1,052 participating schools, 815 public schools and 237 private schools. Second stage :(student sampling) random selection :26,432 students from participating schools, 24,599 participated.	Black students with low self-concept at substantially higher risk of special education placement but the direction of the relationship cannot be determined. Some students (black males) demonstrated low self-concept early on. which put them at higher risk of placement in special education. Conversely, the special education experience may have contributed negatively to self- concept
<u>Study</u>	<u>Research Questions</u>	<u>Type of Design</u>	<u>Findings</u>
Potoff et al. (2000)	What are the perceptions of preservice teachers, faculty, and community personnel as to how the community-based field experience in human services agencies impacts candidates' growth in knowledge, skills, and attitudes?	Empirical, qualitative, survey of 136 candidates in the course, Community based Human Services Field Experience.65 community agencies and 26 faculty who taught the course. Researcher-developed survey: Data source: a 53-item Lickert scale survey.	Results of the survey indicated that the course helped to foster appropriate knowledge, skills, and foster a desire to help others, as well as have a greater amount of empathy as well as a desire to communicate.
Sparks, W. G.III, & Verner, M.E., (1995)	Given 4 approaches to multicultural education in preservice teacher education, which generates the greatest impact on candidates knowledge and attitudes?	Empirical, quantitative pre and post assessments using the Multicultural Physical Education Instrument (MPEI). 228 candidates in courses designated for four-treatment groups: Discipline-specific course, integrated course, field-based experience in public school, and integrated field-based experience in an urban setting.	Multicultural knowledge and attitudes were enhanced in discipline-course approach. The traditional discipline-field based groups declined in misconceptions regarding the perception of multicultural education and became more culturally aware and understanding.
Eddy, E. (1969)	What influence do veteran teachers have on novice teachers?	Case studies qualitative, conceptual.	Experienced teachers indoctrinate new teachers with attitudes, behaviors, and values that they have defined as appropriate for teachers working in an education bureaucracy.
Mardle, G., & Walker, M. (1980)	What impact do teacher education programs have on student teachers' own beliefs?	Case studies conceptual, qualitative	Teacher education has a weak impact on at least some of the values, beliefs, and attitudes those students bring with them into their teacher education programs
Serna, L. A., & Nielson, M. E. (1998).	Early Detection enabling the identification of a condition before it can reach the referral stage.	A conceptual model suggesting the need for systematic school wide screening as well as primary rather than secondary: promotes interventions before the identification of emotional or behavioral difficulties, minimizes labeling effects and creating a more favorable environment.	Strategy is composed of a number of developmental stages and is meant to pre-empt emotional and academic problems in children.

Table 2.2 Continued

Zeichner, K., Tabachnick, B.R., & Densmore, K., (1987)	Do teachers require more field experience?	Case studies conceptual, qualitative.	Teachers' thinking/thoughts and their behaviors are inseparable and are part of the same event, perspectives are specific to situations rather than generalized beliefs.
Zhang, D., & Katsiyannis, A. (2002).	Examine minority representation (by group) across states and regions for all disabilities, high-incidence disabilities (learning disabilities, mental retardation, and emotional-behavioral disorders), and address variability in light of minority representation in the total student population and state poverty rates.	Conceptual, qualitative, case study meta analysis: original data from three publications were entered into an SPSS.	Educational agencies must engage in school wide, validated instructional and behavioral interventions that address the needs of all students.

Significant Measurement Problems

Significant measurement problems exist with the two categorical variables used to document minority representation. The two significant problems are: (1) the fact that the three disability categories in question are by definition judgmental and determined by a committee of educational experts and the parents without confirming medical diagnosis; and (2) there is no nationally agreed-upon definition of ethnic or racial groups. Who checks the racial/ethnic box on the child's educational record may also be of some importance. Another key concern in the definition of race/ethnicity is that there is no clarification or way to identify bi-racial children in the two national databases maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. Racial information is not available, as educational enrollment forms allow for

only one racial category to be checked. Therefore, bi-racial data are not systematically collected or reported at the local, state, or federal levels (Hodgkinson, 1995). Special-education legislation beginning with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (1975, 1977) and continuing with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997, 1999) provided for access to appropriate educational services at public expense. It substantially increased the number and severity of the disability of students receiving services in public schools.

Multiple experts strongly agree that any evidence of overrepresentation is a symptom that should provoke federal and state agencies into scrutinizing the local school district where decisions about individual children are determined (Finn, Rotherham, & Hokanson, 2001; Harry, Klinger, Sturges, & Moore, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002; Parrish, 2002; Podell & Soodak, 2002; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This scrutiny requires the use of a range of information contributed through multiple data sources. Several complex and intertwining issues fall into overlapping categories, and the problem exists across school districts throughout the United States.

Racial/ethnic information collected and reported by U.S. schools about their students' results from categorizing them into only five groups with no subgroup specifications. There is only one box indicating one racial group per child. No identification of bi-racial or mixed-racial information or further explanation of the acculturation level of the child or family is allowed. There are no consistent definitions for these terms used by schools, districts, states,

or federal agencies. Additionally, there is no consistency about who completes the box—the child’s parent, the special education director, or the school secretary—or what criteria were used for classifying the child. MacMillan and Reschly (1998) stated that although racial/ethnic data may approximate what is happening nationally, they recommend caution in interpretation. The first caution relates to the definition of race/ethnicity, for which there are no uniform guidelines from district to district, within states, or across states. It is unclear who checks the racial designation box or if the child’s surname determines ethnicity. Although the U.S. Office of Management and Budget directs that racial/ethnic data not be treated as “scientific or anthropological in nature,” that is how they are treated in the Office of Civil Rights’ database. MacMillan and Reschly (1998) argued that with no precise definition of variables such as bi-racial, the data are so fraught with measurement problems that any conclusions that might be drawn are compromised.

Researchers have also argued for some type of assessment of the child and family’s level of acculturation. According to Phinney (1996), “There are three aspects that may account for the psychological importance of race/ethnicity: (a) the cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors that distinguish ethnic groups; (b) the subjective sense of ethnic group membership; and (c) the experiences associated with minority status, including powerlessness, discrimination, and prejudice.”

Two federal data sets currently exist that are used for national monitoring of disproportionate representation on an annual basis. Research regarding the extent of the

problem generally relies upon the information contained in them, with both consisting of information reported annually by the local school districts and maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. Both of these databases currently contain information about student enrollment by category of special education eligibility and by their racial/ethnic group.

The oldest database used for the purpose of monitoring disproportionate representation of minority children is that of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which presently focuses only on the representation of minority students in the three high-incidence and judgmental special-education categories of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disabilities.

Problems with the definition of disproportional representation also occur due to the lack of consistency in the method of measuring disproportional representation used in various studies. The following three types of calculations are generally used: (1) risk index, (2) odds ratio, and (3) composition index. I will offer a brief summary of each.

Until 1994, OCR monitored the category of speech and language impaired. Prior to 1992, it also monitored different levels of mental retardation, with mild mental retardation considered the judgmental level (the “gray area”). In 1994, OCR stopped monitoring speech and language impairments because historical analyses of the data revealed that concerns over disproportionate representation of minority students were not confirmed. This OCR practice of monitoring only four, then three, categories “reflected the absence of compelling, or even

suggestive, evidence that a ‘problem’ existed in the remaining nine categories” (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002). OCR data do not include all districts across the country every year. They are comprised of a comprehensive sample that meets specific criteria.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) maintains the second database, which reports on a broader spectrum of information across all 13 categories of disability. Current reports provide information from all 5 racial/ethnic groups across all 13 groups served and the amount of time spent in inclusion in general education. Information in the OSEP database is available through its website.

Coutinho and Oswald (1998) cautioned about the use of OCR data or similar surveys in assessing the problem of disproportionate representation. They raised concerns about definitions of ethnicity and disability. They felt that although useful, the OCR data lack precision due to (a) insufficient criteria for determining race or ethnicity, (b) categories that reflect political exigencies rather than social or biological concepts, and (c) substantial variations across schools in how racial/ethnic classifications are made. Losen and Orfield have led research, entitled the Civil Rights Project, in a quest for a scholarly meta-analysis of papers on the subject. Both the statistical and qualitative analyses gleaned from their research suggest that these racial, ethnic, and gender differences are due to many complex and interacting factors, including unconscious racial bias on the part of school authorities, large resource inequalities that run along lines of race and class, unjustifiable reliance on IQ and other evaluation tools, educators’ inappropriate responses to the pressures of high-stakes

testing, and power differentials between minority parents and school officials. In a society where race is so strongly related to individual, family, and community conditions, it is extremely difficult to know what part of the inequalities are caused by discrimination within the school. These studies, however, uncovered correlations with race that could not be explained solely by factors such as poverty or exposure to environmental hazards.

Socio-Economic Factors

Even when researchers assumed that poverty was independent of race and therefore disregarded race and other background variables, many of the trends highlighted by Orfeld and Losen (2002) appear to contradict the theory that poverty is primarily to blame and that race is not a significant factor. Those trends include the following: (a) pronounced and persistent racial disparities in identification between White and Black children in the categories of mental retardation and emotional disturbance, compared with far less disparity in the category of specific learning disabilities; (b) a minimal degree of racial disparity in medically diagnosed disabilities as compared with subjective cognitive disabilities; (c) dramatic differences in the incidence of disability from one state to the next; and (d) gross disparities between Blacks and Hispanics and between Black boys and girls, in identification rates for the categories of mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed.

Students with disabilities enter school undiagnosed and are referred by regular classroom teachers for evaluations that may lead to special-education identification and placement. Therefore, the cause of the observed racial disparity is rooted not only in the

system of special education itself, but also in the system of regular education as it encompasses special education. This may be an area of sensitivity that needs to be addressed in teacher training. Most students referred for evaluation for special education are deemed in need of services. If differential referral is a key element, then the perceptions and decisions of classroom teachers, as well as school-level policies and practices that have an impact on students in regular classrooms, are likewise key elements in the decisions of which children are selected for possible SST recommendation.

Special-education evaluations are often presented to parents as a set of discrete decisions based on scientific analysis and assessment, but even test-driven decisions are inescapably subjective. The existence of some bias in test content is not the primary concern. Harry (1994), for example, described how subjective decisions creep into all elements of the evaluation process, including whom to test, what test to use, when to use alternative tests, how to interpret student responses, and what weight to give results from specific tests. All of these alter the outcomes. As Harry and Anderson (1994) pointed out, “A pen stroke of the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR)” lowered the IQ score cutoff point for mental retardation from 85 to 70, “swiftly curing thousands of previously disabled children.”

School politics, influential relationships between school authorities and minority parents, the quality of regular education, and classroom-management skills of the referring teacher also introduce pivotal elements of subjectivity that often go unrecognized. Other race-linked influences at work include poorly trained teachers who are disproportionately

employed in minority schools (some of whom use special education as a disciplinary tool), other resource inequalities associated with race, beliefs in African-American inferiority and the low expectations that accompany such beliefs, cultural insensitivity, fear and misunderstanding of Black males, and overcrowded schools and classrooms that are disproportionately filled with minority students. With the additional trend of white parents' activism and the high use of social resources exercised on behalf of their children, compared to the relative lack of parent power among minority parents, one can understand how the combination of regular education problems and the special-education identification process has had a distinct impact on students of different races and ethnicities.

The Question of Racial Disparity

To tackle racial disparities in achievement and graduation rates, the president and Congress embraced three approaches to reform: public reporting, accountability at all levels (school, district, and state), and mandatory enforcement. These three approaches could be used to address the gross racial disparities in special-education identification, restrictiveness of placement, and quality of services.

For policymakers, there is no need to pinpoint a specific cause or to allege racial discrimination in order to achieve racial equity. Scholars (McDiarmid & Price, 1990; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) reported that many schools authorities still regard students with disabilities as the embodiments of their particular disability and ask only what the special educators are required to do in order to accommodate the student's problem. A universal

commitment to equity in special education would help erode this deficient model by shifting the focus to what all public educators should do to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all children. A paradigm shift in thought among the education system as a whole needs to occur. “In equitable and excellent schools, the goal of the whole school is to get each and every child, no matter what his or her differences are and no matter what he or she has learned at home, to learn the designated curriculum materials at the highest level” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 68).

There is bipartisan acknowledgment that special-education issues faced by minority children need a federal legislative response. This apparent consensus holds promise for effective federal reform. In 1997, IDEA was amended to require states to collect and review data on racial disproportionality in both identification and placement and to intervene where disproportionality is significant. Prior to these amendments, the OCR made racial disproportionality in special education a top priority. The persistence of this problem suggests that states’ legal obligations under IDEA and our civil-rights enforcement priorities have not been met.

OCR was once a major force in the effort to desegregate our nation’s schools, suggesting that the agency’s efficacy is related to political will as much as it is to resources. These legal efforts demonstrate that there is a glaring need for stepped-up enforcement and oversight by both federal and state agencies. In addition, actions must be geared toward encouraging the active participation of educators at all levels if there is to be meaningful and

lasting improvement. Most important, aggressive efforts to remedy these issues are only the starting point. The efficacy of enforcement interventions and attempted reforms must be evaluated according to their outcomes for minority children.

Both general and special-education teachers and administrators need better training to deliver effective instruction in the least restrictive, most inclusive environment appropriate. Meeting this need, along with the need for better data collection on racial and ethnic disparities and enhanced civil-rights enforcement, would require an infusion of special-education funds that could be expected to result in net gains in education outcomes and savings in juvenile-justice expenditures in the long term. By increasing federal oversight and by encouraging states to intervene where appropriate, the federal government could help improve the quality of instruction, supports, and services received by minority students in both regular and special education.

Although OCR still does not collect national data to determine racial disparities in the educational environment, the 1997 IDEA amendments obligate the states to collect sampled data. If the government required every state and school district to collect disaggregated data that included race, disability category, and educational setting, knowledge of overrepresentation would expand considerably.

Three Methods of Measurement

Three methods of measuring disproportionate representation are used in the research. Problems with the definition of disproportional representation also occur due to the lack of

consistency in the methods of measuring disproportional representation used in various studies. The following three types of calculations are generally used: (1) risk index, (2) odds ratio, and (3) composition index. Each is summarized and appears with references.

The risk index (RI) is calculated by dividing the number of students in a given racial/ethnic category served in a given disability category by the total enrollment for that racial/ethnic group in the school population. The RI calculation reveals the percentage of all students of a given racial/ethnic group identified in a specific disability area. The odds ratio (OR) divides the risk index of one racial/ethnic group by the risk index of another racial/ethnic group and thereby provides a comparative index of risk. The OR is calculated by comparing one racial group to all other groups. The composition index (CI) is calculated by dividing the number of students in any given racial/ethnic group in any given disability category by the total number of all students, summed across all five racial/ethnic categories enrolled in that same disability category. It reflects the proportion of all children served under a given disability category who are members of a given racial group. The sum of all five racial categories equals 100%. The CI for any racial group can then be compared to the total enrollment for that racial group. This index was used in the landmark *Larry P. v. Riles* case (1972). The data reported indicate that 25% of total mildly mentally retarded (MMR) enrollments were African-American students.

Coutinho and Oswald (1998) addressed the ethnic representation of students identified as having serious emotional disturbance. Rather than interpreting DR by the use of

simple proportions and the use of percentages, they proposed calculating a relative risk proportion. This measure defines the “degree of disproportionate representation as the extent to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category” (p. 80), such as African-American students having ED or MMR. Using their formula and an OCR sample of 1,472 districts across the nation, their analysis showed that African-American students had a relative risk for being identified as SED of 1.55 and 2.63 for MMR. In other words, African-American students were about one and one-half times more likely than non-African Americans to be identified as SED, and more than two and one-half times more likely to be identified as MMR.

A critical measurement problem in attempting to assess the extent of disproportionate representation is that whether using risk index, odds ratio, composite index, or population percentages, the calculation is accomplished by measuring the intersection of two categorical variables—racial/ethnic group and disability category—both of which are fraught with measurement errors. The evaluation of disproportionate representation requires being cognizant of these concerns over the possible effects of measurement errors while studying the national and state data available on the overrepresentation of minority children in special education. Despite long-standing public concern, professional debate, and a number of analyses of ethnic representation in special education, the actual proportions and causes of the apparent disproportionality are not understood.

Because these studies vary with respect to ethnic and racial category, disability

condition, definition of minority representation, and technical method, the result is an unclear picture of the proportions of racial and ethnic groups in special education. Hence, the current literature on disproportional representation generally produces more confusion than clarity. However, the information presented in this section describes the minimal longitudinal data available, which have been used to monitor overrepresentation of minority children in special-education programs since 1974.

Historical information is presented using the four judgmental disability categories, three of which are of current concern. All calculations are based on OCR data from 1974 through 1998, as OCR has maintained the only longitudinal national database monitoring data submitted annually by the states. Statistics are presented for both the Risk Index (RI) which is the percentage of children from a racial/ethnic group identified in a given disability category, and the Odds Ratio (OR), which divides the RI of one racial/ethnic group by the RI of a second group, thereby providing an index of risk. The OR calculations in this section use the RI for White children for comparison.

For the past 30 years, there has been a consistent decline in the rate at which schools classify children as mentally retarded. Examining the OCR data since 1974 showed that the RI for African-American children has been consistently higher than for all other groups. The highest rate reported was in 1976, when the Risk Index for African Americans was 4.07 percent of all African American students classified as mentally retarded. However, since 1976, there was a steady decline until 2006, the most recent year available, when the RI

within the specific county in North Carolina in which the research will take place was 1.39 for African-Americans, 0.78 Hispanics, 0.31 Asians, 1.13 Native Americans, and 0.84 Whites. Across all years of OCR surveys, the RI was the lowest for Asians/Pacific Islanders. It did not vary much from 0.50, thus indicating a noticeable outlier from that of the other racial groupings.

Over this period, the rates for White students were between 1.0 and 1.3. For American Indian/Alaskan Native children, the RI ranged from a high of 1.99 in 1976 to a low of 1.25 in 1988 and in 1990. Today's rate is 1.28 percent for this group. The rate for Hispanic children fell from a high of 1.50 percent in 1974 to 0.92 percent in 1998. Since 1992 the rate for Hispanic children has remained below 1.00 percent. In fact, their 1997 rate was one-half that of their 1974 rate.

Using Odds Ratio calculations, which offer a comparison of relative risk among groups, the same OCR data tells a similar story in a different way. One calculation of the OR for Hispanic students indicates that their 1974 OR was 1.26, so they had a one-quarter higher identification rate than their White counterparts. Today, their identification rate is one-quarter lower (0.78) than of White students. Although declining from a high in 1974 of 3.12, the OR for African-American students in 1998 remained high, at 2.24.

The learning disabilities risk index rates for all five racial/ethnic groups exceeded 6.0 percent, except Asians/Pacific Islanders at 2.23 percent. The highest rate is for American Indians/Alaskan Natives at 7.45 percent. These data reflect the epidemic increases in four of

the five-racial/ethnic groups. The range for non-Asian racial/ethnic groups in 1974 was 1.03 to 1.60 percent. The RI for these four groups in 1998 ranged from 6.02 percent to 7.45 percent. The RI for American Indian/Alaskan Native children has been the highest every year since 1974.

Odds ratios calculated based on the same OCR data also revealed higher patterns of identification for American Indians/Alaskan Natives than for White children (OR between 1.15 and 1.58). For African-American and Hispanic students, the OR has fluctuated around 1.0. Since there was no significant over representation for these two groups, there has been less concern expressed about disproportionate representation for the learning disabilities category. However, there is concern about the rapidly increasing numbers of children across all racial/ethnic groups.

Data from 2006 indicated that children in all racial/ethnic groups were less likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed than mentally handicapped (retarded) or having a learning disability. However, there was variability among the groups, with African American children being the most likely to be identified with a RI of 1.45 percent calculated on OCR data. The RI for White children was 0.91 percent, for American Indian/Alaskan Native children 1.03 percent, for Asian/Pacific Islander children 0.26 percent, and 0.55 percent for children of Hispanic descent.

For all five groups, the risk of being classified as emotionally disturbed has shown a consistent and gradual increase every year since 1974. The ranking order of the groups has

remained consistent, with African-American students the highest, followed in order by American Indian/Alaskan Natives, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. Rates have increased about the same for African-Americans and American Indians/Alaskan Natives, which are higher than those for White students. The rates of increase in risk for emotional disturbance have been relatively slow for Hispanic students and extremely slow for Asians/Pacific Islanders. Odds ratios show steady increases for all racial/ethnic groups over time with the exception of Hispanic students whose OR for emotional disturbance declined from 0.97 in 1974 to 0.60 in 1998.

The 1998 risk indices for each group are as follows: African Americans 2.28 percent, American Indians/Alaskan Natives 2.41 percent, Asians/Pacific Islanders 1.42 percent, Hispanics 1.92 percent, and White students 2.54 percent. Since the Risk Index is the highest for White students, all Odds Ratios for the other groups would be less than 1.0. These national comparisons show that there continues to be no over representation of minority children in speech and language programs.

Teacher Beliefs and Cultural Orientation

The overarching question is whether these results are true representations of the students' abilities or of the teachers' judgment in placement. According to Goodlad (1990), the literature indicates that some teacher candidates presuppose that not all children are capable of learning. Teacher candidates, as well as experienced teachers (Guskey, 1988; Pajares, 1992), have been found to contemplate beliefs that are challenging to transform

through exposure to new ideas alone (Deering & Stanutz, 1995; Kagan, 1992). Is there a faction of professionals who truly appreciate the delicacy and subtlety of cultural dissimilarities that set in motion an approach to learning that begins years prior to walking into a classroom? Is this true of students as well as teachers?

Researchers (Ladson-Billings, 1992; McKenzie, 2002; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) have shown that without proper reflection, application, and contextualization, internalization of values and knowledge regarding cultural diversity is unlikely to arise for teacher candidates. A common practice among prospective teachers is to interpret social difference and inequality through a skewed perspective in which success is directly related to individual achievement and talent, irrespective of environmental or broader social factors such as racial discrimination, poverty, unequal treatment in public institutions, language barriers, and other patterns of oppression. The effects of this orientation are justification of patterned, negative judgments and actions against children and their capabilities (King, 1991; McDiarmid & Price, 1990). For some researchers, these circumstances warrant the judgment that most teacher candidates are “culturally insular” (Zimpher & Harvey, 1992, p. 90). Talk of cultural diversity is typically confined to “safe” areas that demand little reflective inquiry. Uncertainty is avoided, as are questions about consequences of pedagogical decisions and the ethical dimensions of education (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Even when some progress is made toward changing teacher candidates' beliefs about children, social difference, and inequity, teachers may revert to traditional ways and established beliefs (McDiarmid & Price,

1990) or utilize them in such a way as to strengthen their original positions prior to a field experience (Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). This may be the case even when apparent advances in teacher candidates' politically consultative views were demonstrated in their work for related courses in sociology (Mardle & Walker, 1980). The researchers discussed above reported problems that require serious attention in the course of preservice teacher education. I would argue, however, that to impose culpability only on the student teachers, however convenient and logical, is hindering a remedy insofar as there is a lack of investigation into alternative explanations for inadequate learning. Such analyses do not contextualize teachers' learning and understanding by taking into account the boundary of political realities and awareness of everyday practices. Ironically, this is the exact criticism such analyses level toward teacher candidates. The impediments that keep researchers from going beyond dominant and singular causes for teacher candidates' problematic negotiation with social difference may arise from assumptions based on traditional models of occupational socialization. The functionalist view, for example, emphasizes the method and purpose of socialization, specifically how the ideas and behaviors of prospective teachers (or other professionals) are shaped (Eddy, 1969; Merton, Reader, & Kendall, 1957). This view assumes that the present passively internalizes the indoctrination of orientations delivered in the training program. Symbolic interaction models of occupational socialization emphasize the agency of the participants and speak of participants' selection, interpretation, and response to the delivery—their active engagement with the process.

Cultural Mismatch/White Privilege

McIntosh (1988, 1990) reflected, as a White teacher, what she had been taught about racism beyond something that places others at a disadvantage. She had been trained not to see the consequences of White privilege, which put her at an advantage at the expense of others.

Thinking Whites were carefully taught not to recognize White privilege, she had begun in an uninformed way to ask what it is like to have White privilege and came to see it as an invisible package of unearned assets, which one can count on cashing in each day, but which was “meant” to remain oblivious. Describing White privilege makes one newly accountable. She discovered a pattern running through the “matrix of White privilege,” a pattern of assumptions, passed on through generations of White culture. The one key piece of that phenomenon was the cultural domination. Being of the main culture, she could also criticize it fairly freely without reprisal.

Just as her racial group was assertive, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made to feel unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected her from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which was being subtly trained to descending turn upon people of color.

Many White students and teachers in the US believe that racism does not affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see “Whiteness” as a racial identity. One dynamic seems clear: racism assumes an active form that we can see and an embedded form

that a member of the dominant group is not taught to see.

In her class and place, she did not see herself as a racist, as she acknowledged racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in the invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on her group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems is enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if White individuals changed their attitudes. (But) a “White” skin in the United States opens many doors for Whites, whether or not they approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individuals cannot end these problems. Collectively redesigning social systems, they must first acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions.

The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool. They keep the thoughts about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making such subjects unmentionable. Most discussion by Whites regarding equal opportunity seems to be about attempting to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already. Systemic change takes many decades

Irvine (2007) stated that “culturally relevant pedagogy” describes effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. It can be daunting to understand and implement. Yet even when people do not know the term, they tend to appreciate culturally relevant pedagogy

when they see it. Often, these well-meaning educators assume that culturally relevant pedagogy means merely acknowledging ethnic holidays, including popular culture in the curriculum, or adopting colloquial speech. Many are afraid to take it farther because they believe the following falsehoods:

1. Only teachers of color can be culturally relevant.
2. Culturally relevant pedagogy is not appropriate for White students.
3. Caring teachers of diverse students have no classroom-management skills.
4. The purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy is to help diverse students “feel good” about themselves.
5. Culturally relevant teachers attend to learning styles by addressing African American male students’ need for kinesthetic activities or by allowing Asian- American students to work alone.

A culturally relevant pedagogy builds on the premise that learning may differ across cultures and that teachers can enhance students’ success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice.

Culturally relevant pedagogy has theoretical roots in the notion that learning is a socially mediated process and related to students’ cultural experiences. Culture is an important survival strategy that is passed down from one generation to another through the processes of enculturation and socialization, a type of roadmap that guides and shapes behavior. If new information is not relevant to those frameworks of culture and cognition,

people will never remember it. If the information is relevant, they will never forget it.

The cultural norms and behaviors of schools are based on a very specific set of mainstream assumptions. When there is a cultural mismatch or cultural incompatibility between students and their school, certain negative outcomes might occur, such as miscommunication; confrontations among the student, the teacher, and the home; hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem; and possibly school failure. Teachers need to find pertinent examples in students' experience; they need to compare and contrast new concepts with concepts students already know; they need to bridge the gap between the known (students' personal cultural knowledge) and the unknown (materials and concepts to be mastered).

Culturally relevant teaching isn't about lowering those "high expectations." It's about providing strong supports by approaching effective instruction through a cultural lens. I believe that many diverse students fail in schools not because their teachers don't know their content but because their teachers haven't made the connections between the content and their students' existing mental schemes, prior knowledge, and cultural perspectives. In helping learners make sense of new concepts and ideas, culturally relevant teachers create learning opportunities in which students' voices emerge and knowledge and meaning are constructed from the students' perspectives.

Culturally relevant teachers recognize that they do not instruct culturally homogenized, generic students in generic school settings. Teachers armed with a repertoire of

generic teaching skills often find themselves ineffective and ill-prepared when faced with a classroom of culturally diverse students.

Teachers need to re-envision their roles in schools. Culturally relevant teachers are systemic reformers, members of caring communities, reflective practitioners and researchers, pedagogical content specialists, and antiracist educators. As systemic reformers, culturally relevant teachers must lead, not simply respond to, the call for whole school reform. Educating and mentoring peers is part of that. All teachers, not just novices, benefit from the expertise and guidance of master teachers who observe their classes and coach them on a regular basis. In addition, teachers need time to observe master teachers in their classes and periods for conferencing and planning.

They also need to make time to reflect on their classroom experiences. Reflection enables teachers to examine the interplay of context and culture as well as their own behaviors, talents, and preferences. Reflective teachers are inquirers who examine their actions, instructional goals, methods, and materials in reference to their students' cultural experiences and preferred learning environments. The culturally relevant teacher probes the school, community, and home environments searching for insights into diverse students' abilities, preferences, and motivations. This type of reflection assists teachers in confronting their misunderstandings, prejudices, and beliefs about race that impede the development of caring classroom climates, positive relationships with their students and families, and ultimately their students' academic success.

Thinking of culturally relevant teachers as action researchers extends another important component of the reflection process. Action research is inquiry conducted *by* teachers for teachers for the purpose of higher student achievement. Action research requires teachers to identify an area of concern, develop a plan for improvement, implement the plan, observe its effects, and reflect on the procedures and consequences.

Finally, student achievement is not the only purpose of a culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant teachers must also assist students to change the society, not simply to exist or survive in it. For some teachers, this can be very challenging. When teachers promote justice, they directly confront inequities in society such as racism, sexism, and classism. Far too many teachers appear to be not only colorblind, but also unable or unwilling to see, hear, or speak about instances of individual or institutional racism in their personal and professional lives.

Is there a theoretical perspective(s) holding them together and affording them to meet the criteria of culturally relevant teaching? Ladson-Billings (1995) began to look for commonalties in teachers' beliefs and ideologies. She discovered Lipman (1993) had suggested that, despite considerable attempts at school reform and restructuring, teacher ideologies and beliefs often remained unchanged, particularly toward African-American children and their intellectual aptitude(s). She was also able to construe some broad propositions (or characteristics) that served as theoretical underpinnings of culturally relevant pedagogy. The three broad propositions that had emerged from the research centered around

(1). the conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, (2). the manner in which social relations were/are structured by culturally relevant teachers, and (3). the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers.

Teachers must consciously create social interactions to help themselves meet the three previously mentioned criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Much has been written about classroom social interactions (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rist, 1970; Wilcox, 1982). The vigor of some of the research in this area is evidenced by its impact on classroom practices. For example, teachers throughout the nation have either heard of or implemented various forms of cooperative learning (Cohen & Benton, 1988; Slavin, 1987): cross-aged, multi-aged, and heterogeneous ability groupings.

Teachers must maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrating a connectedness with all of the students, developing a community of learners, and encouraging students to learn collaboratively, thus becoming responsible for another. In those classrooms, the teacher-student relationships must be impartial and reciprocal. All of the teachers need to offer students opportunities to act as teachers. The culturally relevant teachers must encourage a community of learners rather than competitive, individual achievement. By demanding a higher level of academic success for the entire class, individual success would not suffer. Rather than lift up individuals (contributing to feelings of peer alienation), the teacher would have the students believe they were one component of a class of intelligent children.

To solidify the social relationships in their classes, the teachers must encourage the students to learn collaboratively by teaching each other and to become responsible for the academic success of others. Those collaborative arrangements are not necessarily structured like those of cooperative learning, as they can be a combination of formal and informal peer collaborations.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that early sociolinguistic explanations have failed to include the larger social and cultural contexts of students and that the cultural ecologists have failed to explain student success. There is apparently a critical need for a culturally relevant theoretical perspective on the growing disparity between the racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of teachers and students along with the continued academic failure of minorities in a culturally disconnective classroom.

Possessing cultural awareness and utilizing cultural literature are critical skills and behaviors for a teacher to have because without them, a “lack of understanding is created, that frequently leads teachers to employ disciplinary responses that would not be necessary if they understood the meaning of the students’ behavior.”

Harry and Anderson (1994) and Villegas (1991) considered an effective teacher to be “defined by the ability to create meaningful classroom activities that take into account students’ background experiences” (p. 18).

Irvine (1990) ascribes much of a student’s failure as a deficiency in cultural correspondence between students and their teachers. In order to effectively teach to the needs

of our children, all school professionals should be able to deliver culturally sensitive services (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005). To interrelate with a group of minority students based on the assumptions, practices, and values of the majority culture diminishes the distinctive philosophies, cultural experiences, and alternative repertoires to approaching education possessed by minority students. Therefore, “Administrators should offer in-services to employees that heighten employees’ awareness” (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). Apparently, one size does not fit all. Teachers must begin to sanction students who originate from cultural backgrounds other than their own by educating themselves and fostering an evolving professional path so as to augment their instructional compatibility with all students.

Harry, Klingner, and Hart (2005) measured the impact of both negative attitude and perceptions held by school personnel on African-American children living in poverty. They discovered that such preconceived notions do defile the consciousness of school personnel members and eventually affect their interaction with students and their parents.

Livingston and Nahimana (2006) recommended that teachers undergo professional development emphasizing understanding cultural differences and that schools work more diligently to identify and recruit more male teachers and create community collaborations with representatives from schools, local businesses, government offices, religious institutions, and various community stakeholders.

In addition to these suggestions, students should be required to complete inventories (i.e., teachers should deliberately gather information about their students’ personal, cultural,

familial, and neighborhood backgrounds), teachers should adopt a proactive stance toward discipline (i.e., providing students with explicit standards of acceptable behavior), everyone should be held equally accountable, and finally, teachers should incorporate physical movement (i.e., integrating kinesthetic movement into lesson plans, increasing teachers' tolerance of noise levels, reducing "teacher talk," and incorporating multisensory experiences) in the classroom (Monroe, 2006).

Another possible solution calls for early intervention when identifying problems in students (Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). Other solutions in addressing the overrepresentation of Black males in special education programs include encouraging parental involvement and support and helping teachers and administrators identify their personal feelings toward children who come from a background different from their own (McIntyre & Pernell, 1985).

Spurgeon and Myers (2003) offered solutions in the form of creating a mentoring program, providing tutorial assistance, and involving the family in the educational process of minority students to address the issue of overrepresentation. Further solutions include providing culturally responsive literacy instruction that links classroom content to student experiences and providing comprehensive literacy programs and academically oriented remedial programs for minorities (Tatum, 2006). Harry and Anderson (1994) suggested that teachers conduct assessments for the purpose of guiding instruction as opposed to determining program eligibility and those practitioners should label services rather than labeling students.

Additionally, when addressing the overrepresentation of minority students in special-education services, school systems need to provide schools with adequate and effective resources. Although school resources appear in a variety of forms, the most important resource relevant to this study is that of qualified teachers who possess a high degree of teacher efficacy. Again, based upon previously presented research, the neediest students often receive the least experienced and least prepared teachers (Stover, 1999). This practice of “handicapping” students must immediately cease, as it further debilitates students’ learning, leaving them academically ill-prepared and ill-equipped. Schools and school districts need to adamantly and vigorously invest in providing meaningful and useful professional-development opportunities for inexperienced teachers. Mentorship programs should also be implemented to strengthen the skills of inexperienced teachers and broaden their knowledge base.

With a concerted and conscientious effort in the aforementioned areas, both teachers and school districts will begin to address the issue of overrepresentation of minorities in special-education programs and would have a better understanding of cultural mismatch within the schools, minimizing the insidious perpetration that the White way is the right way.

Effective Assessment

The complexities associated with assessing racial minorities in both cognitive and behavioral areas are well documented (Arnold & Lassmann, 2004; Loe & Miranda, 2002). Valuable assessments must include environmental assessments as well as teacher

bias/skill/cultural competence. Influential environmental factors include the (a) working conditions within the school system, (b) pressures within the school, and (c) ecology of the classroom. Loe and Miranda (2002) pointed out that in urban areas, partly due to large caseloads, thorough evaluations are often sacrificed in the interest of expediency.

Having an assessment of the student's classroom at the time of referral can provide useful information as well (Harry, Klingner, Sturges, & Moore, 2002). This implies that students need to be in well-organized and structured classrooms taught by highly competent teachers. Another aspect of the classroom assessment should be the appropriateness of the academic instruction, that is, whether the instruction is presented at the performance level of the student(s) or contributes to frustration and learning or behavioral problems.

Opposing Views to the Belief in Minority Overrepresentation

MacMillan and Reschly (1998) have emphasized that overrepresentation data, as tempting as they may be, should not be predicated on any causal inferences. Their findings are contrary to the more common belief that there is cultural/socio-economic deprivation/differentiation that has laid the groundwork as a causal factor in misrepresentation. They have indicated that interpretation of figures, as evidence of discrimination in the identification and placement procedure, must await additional substantiation prior to placements of the majority in a specific category. Until such a time, we must assume the disproportionate numbers of students reflective in these programs are "correct" and those involving minorities are "erroneous" solely on the specificity of ethnicity.

Their research indicates the overrepresentation figures are not linked to specific ethnic characteristics placed into a specific judgmental category. They maintain, in fact, that so-called discrimination is a double-edged sword. A sustained vigilance is paramount in the continual and appropriate placement practice and procedure in order to prevent the qualification of any child for services for which they do not qualify and from which they will not benefit, as well as to prevent the denial of access of services for which they do qualify and from which they would most likely benefit. Phinney (1996, p. 918) stated that to address the problem of overrepresentation, it was “necessary to unpack the package variable of ethnicity.” She continued, “Even within an ethnic group whose members share a relatively precise ethnic label, there is tremendous heterogeneity” (p. 919).

Several researchers have called for more research on overrepresentation (Hosp & Rechsly, 2004; Oswald et al., 2002; Patton, 1998; Serna & Nielson, 1998; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Oswald et al. stated that the research on overrepresentation needed to be more focused. They asserted that additional studies must be undertaken that identified the disproportionate representation of African Americans and other minorities in the specific disability categories of LD, SED, and MMR. They also proposed that data compiled from research be adjusted for variables such as poverty and ethnicity for the various ethnic groups and disability classifications. Oswald et al. encouraged studies utilizing multiple methodologies that were disaggregated at the community, school-building, and classroom levels. They also stated that the data collected from extensive research needed careful

analysis to fully explain the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

Zhang and Katsiyannis (2002) agreed that further research was needed and should include data disaggregated to the district level. They stated that district-level minority data should incorporate multiple factors, for instance, the characteristics of the district (urban versus rural); the total student population; the percentage of the teachers in the district with earned advanced degrees; the SES of the district, including the percentage of students receiving free lunch and the local unemployment and poverty rates; the district expenditures per student; and the percentage of students receiving Title I services. Although Hosp and Reschly (2004) agreed that aggregating data to the district level was necessary, they felt future studies needed to examine data on overrepresentation at the individual level. They believed that more complex analysis methods would be needed and suggested using either Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) or Classification and Regression Tree Analysis (CART). Spencer, Seaton, and Harlapani (as cited in Shaffer, Ortman, & Denbo, 2002) indicated that there had been insufficient research on the minority students that did succeed in school despite adversity. They stated that qualitative research needed to be done on those students' reasons for success, rather than more research on their reasons for failure (case studies). If all minority students had access to an education stressing those criteria for success, fewer would be classified as eligible for special education services.

Coutinho and Oswald (as cited in Meyer & Patton, 2001) offered a few suggestions for further research: (a) research that determines whether ethnic groups are "susceptible" to a

particular disability; (b) longitudinal analysis to discern changes over time on the overrepresentation of minority students in each district; (c) studies that deal with observer bias; and (d) analyzing the process that guides the identification of students with disabilities. A recommendation for further research was also made by the Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education (NRC, 2002). The committee recommended the formation of a national advisory panel to collect nationally representational data that would make possible more informed studies on minority overrepresentation in special education. That data collected should include race, gender, SES, social background, and other antecedents to being classified as eligible for special-education services.

In addition, the committee stated the data should also include school factors such as school and classroom resources, class size, teacher experience, and instructional strategies used (NRC, 2002). Artiles, Harry, Reschly, and Chinn (2002) stated that future research must focus on the following questions relative to the issues of difference: What are the assumptions about difference that inform decisions to place students in special education? What functions are served by the maintenance of a rigid delineation between general and special education? When is overrepresentation a problem? What are the consequences of overrepresentation, for whom, and what is the function of special education in an increasingly diverse society? The literature reviewed above discloses the necessity to undertake more research on the representation of minority students in special education. As Hosp and Rechsly (2003) stated, this research is most clearly needed on the district and

school level, as state data results may be affected and masked by large or small districts in their state. As shown by Patton (1998) and others, this is a very emotional and controversial issue, especially to African-Americans. The statistical data showing that the percentage of African-American students' being classified for special education services is as much as six times greater than that of Caucasian students in certain categories indicates that high priority needs to be placed on gathering, analyzing, and utilizing the data on representation to effect change so that minority students are properly served in all our nation's schools.

Similar Studies

This researcher's search on the site at NCSU library dissertation revealed one study, titled *Characteristics of Teachers Who Are Consistently Successful with Economically Disadvantaged Students*. It was a qualitative study about fourth- and fifth-grade teachers who were successful with economically disadvantaged students, written by Donna Susan Spivey, Ed.D. (under the direction of Dr. Paul Bitting, 2006). The purpose of the research was to identify personal and professional strategies in fourth- and fifth-grade teachers who were continuously successful with economically disadvantaged students. This qualitative study involved two fourth- and two fifth-grade teachers. An initial and a follow-up interview were conducted with each teacher participant. In addition, two classroom observations were completed recording the data on observation charts, scripting, and field notes. Lesson plans, continuous dialogue through email and before and after each observation, and classroom photographs were also examined to support data triangulation. The participants' principals

were also asked why they thought these teachers had been successful with this student population. Data analysis revealed that those four teachers used similar personal and instructional strategies in their classrooms. In addition, data revealed that common personal characteristics of those teachers, coupled with their philosophies, enhanced their abilities to make personal connections with students, which all four teachers felt to be most important to their academic and school success with economically disadvantaged students. Without the personal connections and understanding of individual students' needs and experiences, the teachers would not have known how to help them make connections with their instruction and academic content.

The personal needs of the students also had to be addressed in such a way as to enhance self-esteem and provide material resources for participation in daily activities and in special activities such as field trips. All four teachers emphasized the importance of providing experiences for students to build a general knowledge base and expressive vocabulary from which students could draw to make successful academic and social connections and have a deeper understanding of their newly gained knowledge. Observing the teachers while interacting with their students had revealed information that could be useful for teachers and administrators who work with economically disadvantaged students. The study established that the personal and instructional characteristics identified in those four teachers could enhance not only teacher and administrator knowledge of how to successfully educate such a student population, but also increase the number of educators

being consistently successful with disadvantaged children.

Additionally, the 2009 dissertation by Bolden entitled *Individualized Interdisciplinary Program: An Examination of Teacher Bias in Special Education Referrals Based upon Student Race and Gender*, focused on research that indicated minority males, especially Black males, were often overrepresented in special education programs. Although the reasons for overrepresentation varied from school to school and from district to district, the literature revealed that many special-education referrals for minority males were generated as a result of non-academic issues. The purpose of his study was to determine if gender and racial bias influenced teachers' decisions when referring students, specifically Black males, for special-education services, and it attempted to answer two questions: Were teachers' biases in making referrals to special-education services based upon student race and/or gender, and were teachers biased in making referrals to special-education services, specifically for Black males? An ANOVA procedure was used to analyze the relationship between teachers' ratings of how likely they were to refer a student for special-education services and how certain they were of their ratings of a student's need for referral. Although the study produced some interesting patterns, no definitive conclusions could be drawn, due to a limited sample size. Additional research was needed to either support or refute the hypotheses that teacher bias does influence one's decision to refer a student to special education services. As it was inconclusive, it furthered this researcher's desire to continue investigation into teachers' beliefs affecting the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

Morrow's (2010) dissertation also focused on the overrepresentation of students from racial and ethnic minority groups in special-education programs. Prompted by federal requirements and by state departments of education having required school districts to examine disproportionality in their schools and propose solutions, a program evaluation was conducted in a suburban New Jersey school district to evaluate a district program to reduce disproportionality. That district utilized intensive data collection and district-wide professional development in varying formats to influence disproportionality.

The district formed a group of stakeholders known as the District Core Team, learned about disproportionality and proposed solutions for the district. To evaluate the district's efforts; a survey was administered to the members of the District Core Team. The survey focused on changes in staff awareness and thinking about disproportionality and change activities that were most influential on their professional practices. Responses from staff revealed that as a group, they felt that the first year of change-focused activities had increased their awareness about disproportionality and affected their thinking about professional practices. District professional-development activities were rated as helpful in changing staff awareness and thinking, especially a presentation about the district's own disproportionality data. Staff also indicated that the district change activities were likely to continue to have a positive impact on disproportionality and their own professional practices.

Rates of disproportionality did not change significantly after the first year of district activities, although such change was not expected considering the relatively brief time frame

for this study. Based on this district's program to change disproportionality, recommendations for other districts faced with the problem of disproportionality were provided. Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007, p. 271) found, "Teachers' expectations may lead to differential academic performance for children and are likely to contribute to an unfair classroom climate and limited educational opportunities for African-American and Latino/a students."

Chang and Demyan (2007), though they discovered fairly balanced positive and negative stereotypes held by teachers across White and Black students, suggested that stereotypes could add to achievement discrepancies if they changed the way those stereotyped individuals were treated by others or how individuals perceived themselves. They suggested that school psychologists consider stereotypic beliefs and how these may be influencing teachers' referral practices. Though factors related to teacher bias were certainly not the only area of concern, researchers had pointed out that if school personnel were harboring biases or had never explored their own assumptions about race and stereotypes, it was not likely that those same personnel would see the need for or support extensive change efforts in the area of disproportionality (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, et al., 2006).

Therefore, the factors contributing to and involved in disproportionality are complex. Researchers and American educators need to identify not only individual, but systemic factors that contribute to educational inequities (Skiba et al., 2005) as well as further

document how White privilege and racism are a part of creating and maintaining disproportionality (Blanchett, 2006). This problem must be examined in a larger social context (Blanchett, 2006). This problem should not be viewed from a binary perspective, as a result of either individual or structural factors, but rather as the intersection of multiple factors.

In Ruedel's (2009) dissertation, she found that the disproportionate representation of minority students in special-education programs had been a problem that policy makers, administrators, advocates, and researchers grappled with for more than 40 years (Arnold & Lassmann, 2003; Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Dunn, 1968; Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, et al., 2008; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). It was not a phenomenon unique to the United States; for example, it has also been observed and documented in England (Dyson & Kozleski, 2008). According to the most recent Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2,759,522 children ages 6 to 11, 2,904,282 children ages 12 to 17, and 295,478 children ages 18 to 21 received special education and related services under the IDEA in 2004 (26th Annual Report to Congress, 2006). Between 1996 and 2005, the percentage of students with disabilities who had received a diploma or certificate had slowly increased, while the percentage of students with disabilities who had dropped out of school had decreased. Also, the percentage of

students with disabilities graduating with a regular higher-school diploma had increased from 43.5% in 1993-1994 to 51.1% in 2001-2002, and the number of students with disabilities that went on to college had almost tripled since 1978 (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Despite the improvements in the educational opportunities provided to students with disabilities, the outcomes for some eligible children were not always positive. In fact, there could be negative consequences associated with the label (Mitylene & Lassman, 2003). Negative consequences can include being tracked into special-education classes that fail to provide full access to challenging curriculum, lowered teacher and parental expectations, alienation from peers, and the stigmatization of children, which can result in a diminished sense of competence and self-esteem (Cromwell, Blashfield, & Strauss, 1975; Hibbel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2006; Keogh & MacMillan, 1996; Skiba et al., 2008; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008).

When students were more likely to be exposed to these types of negative consequences as a result of belonging to a specific racial/ethnic group or a socio-economic group (overrepresentation), the system-level problem of disproportionality requires further investigation. Dyson and Kozleski (2008) found that if the system for identifying children with disabilities identifies some groups of students, such as Blacks/African-Americans, at a higher proportion than the proportion of Black/African-American students in the general population, yet a proportionate percent of White students are classified as needing to receive special education services, then the system is not working the same across groups and is

potentially discriminatory

A number of studies utilizing national-, state-, and district-level data document evidence of disproportionality (Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Mercer, 1973; Osher et al., 2002; Oswald et al., 1999; Oswald et al., 2002; Parrish, 2000; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Research studies primarily used nationally representative datasets from the OCR, OSEP, and the Common Core of Data (Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Coutinho et al., 2002; Finn, 1982; Hibel et al., 2006; Oswald et al., 1999; Oswald et al., 2001; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). State and district-level datasets also examine disproportionality (Artiles, Rueda, et al., 2005; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Simmone et al., 2005).

Findings consistently indicated that Black/African-American students were more likely to be overrepresented in the categories of MR and ED; American-Indian students were more likely than Whites to be represented in the category of SLD; Hispanic students are slightly underrepresented in the categories of MR, ED, and SLD at the national level; and Asian/Pacific-Islander students are underrepresented in all 13 of the federal disability categories and overrepresented in programs for Talented and Gifted students (Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Coutinho et al., 2002; Finn, 1982; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2006). Hibel, Farkas, and Morgan (2006) overcame some of these limitations by using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) dataset to examine the influence of student- and school-level predictors on the disproportionate representation of minority students in receipt of special-

education services. The ECLS-K study, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), used a nationally representative sample of children who were in kindergarten in 1998–1999, their teachers, their parents, and their schools. The ECLS-K provided descriptive information on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development as they entered school and progressed through middle school. Researchers gathered information about children with a disability through the parent interview, special-education-teacher survey, and school records.

These researchers used the ECLS-K data “to estimate which variables, measured in the fall of kindergarten, predict special education placement by the spring of third grade” (Hibel et al., 2006, p. 13). To analyze the data, researchers conducted descriptive statistics and used multilevel modeling analysis through Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling (HGLM) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The HGLM allowed for the appropriate estimation of student-level effects within separate schools as well as examination of the unique influences of the school environment (between-school effects).

Ruedel's study indicated that when examining the issue of disproportionate representation at the individual student level (as compared to the district or national level), minority students were underrepresented in special-education programs as compared to White students. Further, the strongest predictor of placement in special-education programs was not race, poverty, or any other sociodemographic variable; rather, it is academic achievement (Hibel et al., 2006). Academic achievement, measured by the average of the

student's reading and mathematics test scores taken in the fall of kindergarten, was significant at both the student and school levels. Those findings were inconsistent with earlier research and strongly suggest further examination.

For instance, these findings might be accurate for children in early elementary, but as students progress through elementary school and schools identify more students in the categories of MR, SLD, and ED, the relative influence of race or other sociodemographic variables may have a greater influence on special-education classification. The categories MR, SLD, ED, and SLI are sometimes referred to as "judgmental," "social system," high incidence, or high inference categories because these students are usually not diagnosed by a medical professional, do not exhibit readily observable distinguishing features, and are often not diagnosed until after school entrance (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Since it is generally the responsibility of the classroom teacher to determine when to refer a student to be evaluated for special education, researchers have observed a wide variation in placement rates in judgmental categories across states and districts.

The results of the analyses provided a foundation for understanding the characteristics of each sub-group and a starting point for conducting future longitudinal research to determine factors that could result in a student's movement in and out of special-education service.

The purpose of this research was two-fold: (a) to examine the influence of student- and school-level demographic, economic, academic, and behavioral variables measured in

the third grade on a student's probability of not receiving special-education services in the fifth grade, and (b) to examine the differences among students who have received special-education services and then exit out of special education, students who remain in special education, and students who never received special-education services. This researcher found no published studies that would appear to be replicated by such research. When research that is discovered within a study and not replicated, it deems the findings uncertain in terms of generalization and conclusion(s).

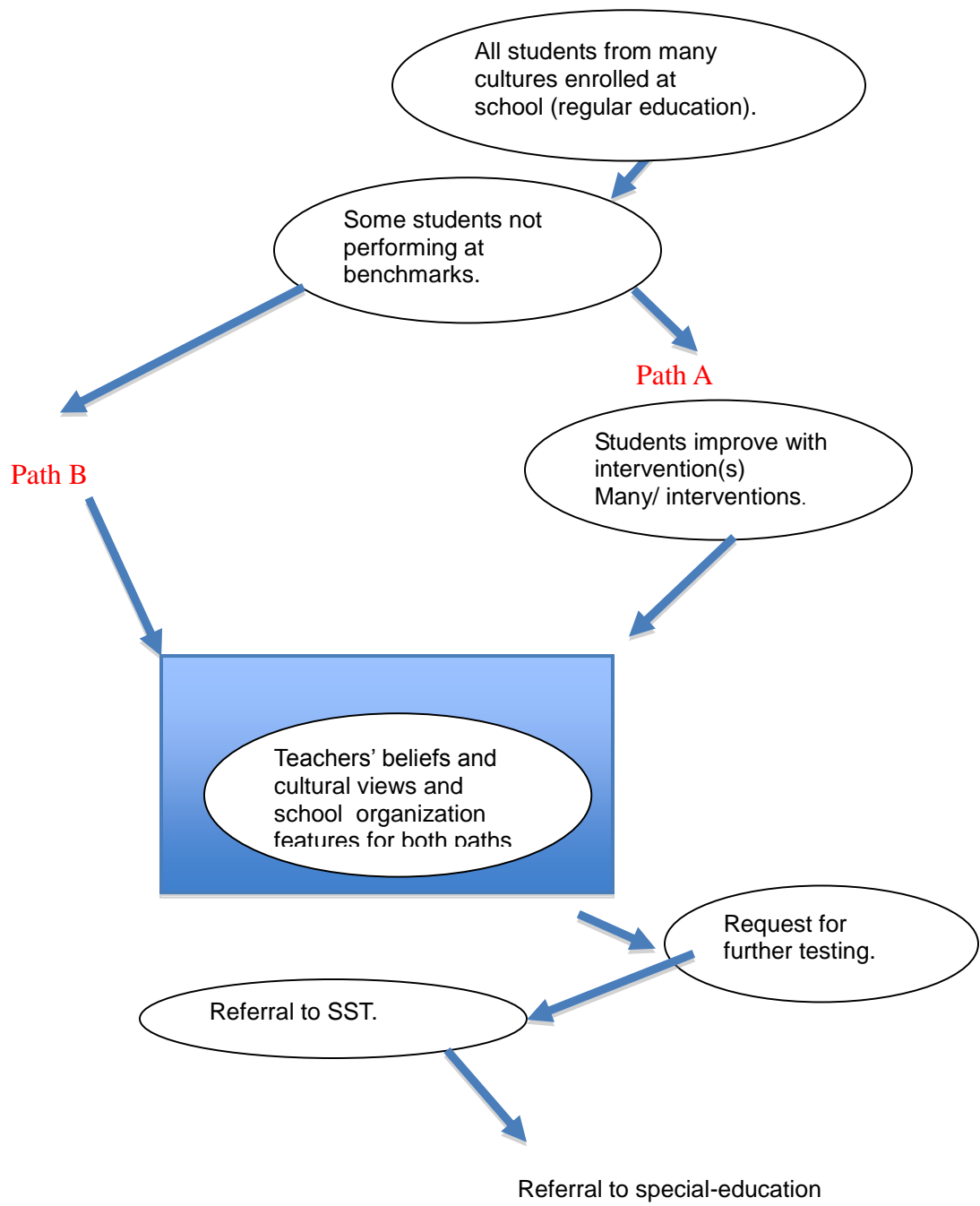


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework: All Enrolled Students

Theoretical to Conceptual Framework

This model shows all students enrolled as a model of intrastudent and teachers within the classroom setting. I had created this model based on the perspective from which to view the contributions of local educational processes to racial and economic disparity entitled *cultural reproduction* theory (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Originally used as an explanation of the continuation of class-based differences, the theory has been advanced to highlight racial and class inequities reproduced over time through institutional and individual actions, and decisions that maintain the status quo at the expense of less privileged groups (Mehan, 1992; Oakes, 1982; Skiba, Bush, & Knesting, 2002). One important implication of cultural reproduction is that those actions or processes may be motivated by individual or institutional habit patterns of which those who participate in those institutional actions are unaware. For instance, the evaluative techniques commonly used by teachers may not fully identify the intellectual resources and talents of low-status children, who are subsequently assessed as poor performers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). If left unchecked, such patterns can unintentionally re-create and reinforce existing inequities in school processes. Each decision-maker brings his or her individual differences, ideologies, and experiences into the institutional arena, the site where the ultimate decision is made. As varied resources come into play, they must be reflected upon under a greater deal of scrutiny. I may reconcile what is happening in these schools vis-a-vis my study results.

Mehan, Hertwick, and Miehl's (1986) ethnographic study of the referral-to-

placement process exemplified the socially constructed nature of disability decision-making. As each step in the process led to a student's placement in a special-education program, both individual teacher judgments and institutional constraints blatantly contributed to the eventual decision to label a student as disabled. Almost one-third of those students who were not declared disabled, for example, failed to be served simply because there was a breakdown in the process and the assessment was terminated. Harry, Klingner, Sturges, and Moore (2002) described similar sources of variability in an ethnographic study focusing primarily on the contributions of school psychologists to special-education assessment and decision-making. Harry et al. noted that although psychological testing is often perceived as an objective procedure less likely to be influenced by individual judgments, the process is in fact often highly idiosyncratic because psychologists choose tests or test batteries that are more likely to produce the results that they, or the teachers making the referral, desire.

From concept to application, the process will follow the progression as shown by Figure 2.1.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2, the researcher has reviewed both empirical and conceptual studies. The revelations gleaned from such a literature review emphasizes the continued need for more research in the area of what beliefs and practices classroom teachers bring with them to the classroom, which may or may not precipitate the overidentification and overrepresentation of a certain group of students due to differences in cultural identities.

In order for the disparity found in racial overidentification within special-education settings to be addressed, stakeholders in schools work should be compelled to promote a convergence of goals. Germane training and the opportunity for professional development are imperative in helping teachers advance, affording them the opportunity to have exposure to the latest research and training. It needs to be ingrained that a student's not performing within a specific modality does not mean that he or she should be jostled towards the special-education portal. This generally occurs with children from culturally diverse, economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, special-education placement continues to be an important issue. This study seeks to answer the overarching question of what fosters or inhibits the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special-education classes within two elementary schools within the same county in central North Carolina, with the additional subquestions:

- (1) What is your school's policy (practice) on initially requesting identifying/testing a particular child? Is there any set of particular "written" policy?
- (2) What role do teachers, school counselors, and school administrators' beliefs and practices play in the identification and referral of students for special education services?
- (3) What role does each of these participants play in recommending or assigning students to special education?

In the next chapter, a research design is presented to answer the following research

questions: How do all involved answer those questions? How does it affect each school culture and the children/staff at each school as a result? Those questions will be revealed through the research and interviews presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to determine if classroom teacher beliefs and practices affected the rate of referrals of students to the School Support Team (SST), possibly leading to the greater degree of students placed in special-education settings. It additionally investigated the role(s) of the school counselor, schools administrator(s), and district administrator in this process at both school sites involved in the study.

This chapter discusses the research questions and the methodology and research utilized in the study, as well as its analysis.

Research Questions

What fosters or inhibits the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special-education classes?

Sub-questions include:

1. What is your school's policy (practice) on initially requesting identifying/testing a particular child? Is there any set of particular "written" policies?
2. What role do teachers, school counselors, and school administrators' beliefs and practices play in the identification and referral of students for special-education services?
3. What role do each of these participants' beliefs and practices play in how teachers

need to diversify lessons in classes for all learners.

Research Design

I selected qualitative research as the logical and appropriate choice for this investigation, for various reasons. First, qualitative research is an examination into the meanings people make of their experiences (Patton, 2002). The main characteristics of qualitative research are the naturalistic or actual settings, descriptive data, focus on the inductive process, and the meaning gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It gives an overview and feel of the school culture. In addition, qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive, humanistic, and fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). My study complemented these criteria by focusing on those characteristics:

1. A specific setting (location of the school),
2. narrative data (interviews),
3. the inductive process (constructing meaning from interviews by finding common intrinsic themes and patterns), enabling readers to perceive relationships as they connect within the setting. (Apple, 1978.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), “A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 54).

A case study of this nature was essential, as “we were interested in it, not because by studying it we learned about other cases or about some general problem, but because we needed to learn about that particular case. We had an intrinsic interest” (Stake, 1995, p. 4).

This study was purposive. According to Patton (2002), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 46).

Data collection processes for case studies are more multifaceted than other research strategies. Yin (2003) proposed following “formal procedures to ensure quality control during the data collection process” (p. 106).

He described three principles of data collection that help in this process:

1. Multiple sources of evidence,
2. Creating a case-study database,
3. Maintaining a chain of evidence.

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to determine if classroom teacher beliefs and practices affected the rate of referrals of students to the School Support Team (SST), possibly leading to the greater degree of students placed in special education settings. This study was conducted within two elementary schools in one North Carolina county. As the researcher taught in that county as a special-education teacher, she refrained from selecting her school in an attempt to remain as objective as possible. She collected background information pertinent to the research and initiated contact with participants at both schools.

Case-study design and methods were used in this investigation, following Yin’s

(2003) and Merriam's (1988) design and methods. The case-study design was compatible with this study because of its ability to respond to the research questions appropriately. "The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" (Yin, 2003, p. 7). Two additional resources could be investigated in case studies: (1) interviews with those involved in the events, and (2) direct observation of the events. The vigor of the case-study approach lay in its capacity to examine a "full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interview, and observations" (Yin, 2003, p. 8).

Additionally, Merriam (1988) referred to the descriptive case study in the following fashion:

Undertaken when description and explanation (rather than prediction based on cause and effect) are sought, when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study (p. 7).

Yin's (2003) definition of a case study expands upon the aforementioned:

An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident...[It also] copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple courses of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (pp. 13–14)

Yin (2003) proposed corresponding the form of the research question to the approach used to generate the data that responded suitably to the question. The researcher's questions asked "which," "why," and "how?" Yin's (2003) approach to choosing the strategy considered three stipulations: (1) the variety of research questions, (2) how much hegemony the investigator had over the events, and (3) whether the focal point was on contemporary or historical events and to what extent. One of the criteria for choosing participants was that they had taught at their specific schools for at least one full year.

The research strategy that was most beneficial in answering the "why" and "how" questions was the case study, which also focused on contemporary events and did not necessitate that the investigator have power over behavioral occurrences. Maintaining a distinctive absence of any input in the presence of data collection was imperative.

Creating the research questions was the first component. The second proponent consisted of any propositions posed by the research, followed by a description of the units of analysis and how the data was to be linked to the propositions. Last, the criterion for interpreting the findings were scrutinized. Data had been linked to the propositions through analysis. Yin (2003) recommended pattern matching as an approach to connecting the data to the propositions. Through data analysis, similar patterns of design and/or instruction had been identified and linked back to the propositions, new propositions based on "relationships discovered among data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 20) had been made, and theoretical categories and emerging themes were built. Merriam (1988) suggested using the constant comparative

method, as pattern matching additionally validated the findings of the study. form of participant-observations. Triangulation of the data from the formal interviews and observations was critical in strengthening the validity of my findings.

A case-study design was chosen based on the main "why" question of the study as to the consistency with which minorities were over-referred for special education testing as opposed to their White counterparts, with the first step being SST (student support team). This study had been used to impart knowledge to teachers and teacher evaluators as to why educators were struggling with that population of students. The two primary sources of evidence had been collected from semi-structured interviews and direct observations in the classroom.

Qualitative case-study research was the logical choice for acquiring expressive information within a convoluted setting. The wide-ranging cultural combination within a school setting was unique and a cause for celebration but could serve as somewhat of a conundrum when finding common ground for a teacher to start to teach, as not all children had received similar preparatory information or came from similar cultural backgrounds. My study was concerned with those particular situations, including the results of such diversity as the result of the vast differences from the start. Were those children's fate(s) predetermined? Was there any support systems available for the students, or any unique personal or situational characteristic(s) for each student and/or teacher, which included societal, media, and peer influences—all of those were integrated and relevant to each student. That myriad

of connections was best explored, analyzed, and understood through descriptive case-study research. Case-study research coped with a situation in which there were variables of interest and it relied on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). In addition, case-study research was a good choice when the interest was in understanding a unique situation (Stake, 1995). When gathering information from the informants, personal presumptions had been set aside so that I could take note of the “voices” speaking their thoughts, while listening with an unbiased ear.

Case-study research evolved from an inductive method where the details that emerged from the study had been considered in their context (Hamel, 1993). The points of view of the informants were considered and evaluated. The qualitative researcher set out to collect data in a real situation that was socially constructed, complex, and continually changing (Glesne, 1999). Data in case-study research was arbitrated by the introspections of the participants. For this reason, this researcher needed participants who were knowledgeable about the situation and its participants.

Yin (2003) listed five research-design components that are especially important to case studies:

1. Research questions;
2. Any propositions;
3. Units of analysis;
4. Linking the data to the propositions; and

5. Criteria for interpreting the findings.

Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) listed six sources of substantiation: physical artifacts, archival records, interviews, documentation, direct observation, and participant-observation. Glesne (1999) and Creswell (1998) listed interviews, observation and document collection, and open-ended surveys as sources as well. Several of those methods of data collection were utilized in this study, as described in more detail below.

Table 3.1: Interview Timetable

Interview Process and Participants
1. District Director of Special Education
2. Principals (1 each) at school A and school B
3. Counselors (1 each) at school A and school B
4. Special-education department chairs at school A and school B
5. Interviews at school A: regular and special-education teachers
6. Interviews at school B: regular and special-education teachers

Steps in the Research Design

1. Identification of two schools: similar populations, free or reduced lunch, minority and/or poor students, with data collected at county level:

- (a) 1 school had a low percentage of minority and poor students in special education.
 - (b) 1 school had a high percentage of minority and poor students in special education.
2. Two site case studies (1 per school):
- (a) identifying what each school was doing (pre-placement services, SST, counseling, etc.).
 - (b) interviewing regular-education and special-education teachers, administrators, and counselors.
 - (c) collecting artifacts at school site (memos, program descriptions, student data, etc).
 - (d) site observations (classrooms/campus).

The research design consisted of two distinct phases, as outlined in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2 Research Phases

Research Questions	Data Collection Procedures
<p>What fosters or inhibits the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special education classes?</p> <p>What roles do teachers, school counselors, and school administrator’s beliefs and practices play in the identification of students for special education services?</p> <p>What role does each of these participants play in recommending or assigning students to special education?</p>	<p>Data from participant interviews and analysis of relevant artifacts.</p> <p>Participants: 2 principals, counselors, special and regular education teachers (2 schools) Phase 1</p> <p>Initial email/phone request followed by person-to-person, taped interviews in confidentiality.</p>
<p>Phase 1: Questionnaires developed for administrator, regular and special education teacher, counselor on sight, and county administrator.</p>	<p>Data from participant interviews, analysis of relevant artifacts, and classroom observations.</p> <p>Participants: 2 principals, counselors, special and regular education teachers (2 schools) Phase 1</p>
<p>Phase 2: Follow up interviews with selected representatives from both school sites, readdressing questions from questionnaire.</p>	<p>Data from questionnaires and participant interviews,</p> <p>Participants: 2 principals, counselors, special and regular education teachers (2 schools) Phase 2</p>

Once receiving on-site administrative approval, the researcher contacted teachers with an introductory email, describing the research and requesting their anticipation in the study. The participants were then asked to participate in an interview, a classroom observation, and a debriefing once data had been coded and analyzed. Each school’s study was completed and analyzed through the aforementioned staff contacts as well as through examination of school artifacts such as syllabi, content, assignments, and prior assessments.

Selection/Samplings

A type of purposeful sampling, maximum variation sampling, was done to select the teachers, staff, and administrators for this case study. Purposeful sampling is a sample from which the qualitative researcher can learn the most (Merriam, 1988). The logic and focus of purposeful sampling is derived from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). An additional element to the purposeful sampling was snowball sampling, a method of locating information-rich significant informants (Patton, 1990). Using this method, a few prospective respondents were contacted and asked whether they knew of anybody with the characteristics with notable knowledge necessary for the study. Snowball sampling was not an impartial device. It was a way of selecting participants and then using other tools, such as interviews or surveys. Having identified individuals with the skills, knowledge, or characteristics required, this researcher approached those people about participating in an identity-consultation process.

This manner of sampling used recommendations to find people with the specific range of skills that had been determined as having knowledge about those who have skills or information in particular areas. It allowed the researcher to identify the resources within a select population, selecting those individuals best suited for the needs of the project or process. It helped to determine stakeholders by increasing the number of participants in the process of building on resources of existing networks and locating stakeholders that were yet unknown to this researcher.

All participants filled out an Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form before participating in the study. I requested permission from the school district to conduct my research. I established my study upon approval by contacting principals by mail and requesting permission to complete the data collection for my research in their schools. Other participant(s) necessary to complete this study were employees in the school district, including the education-services staff as well as individuals in the evaluation and research department who needed to approve and monitor research studies conducted at the county site.

This was a qualitative study that explored two elementary schools in North Carolina. As the researcher, my goal had been to investigate, identify, and analyze the instructional and personal strategies that were being put into practice by classroom teachers at both schools. My investigation focused on the differences as well as similarities gleaned from the belief systems and practices of the teachers, in an effort to account for the vast difference between the two schools in the number of referrals to special education. This had been accomplished through interviewing regular and special education teachers at both elementary schools, their principals, their school counselors, and their central-office special-education personnel.

Research Site Selection

Aspire Elementary School had been selected, as it had a total enrollment of 832 students, with 65 students in exceptional programs: 36 African-American, 1 American Indian, 1 Asian, 11 Hispanic, 1 multiracial, and 15 White. Belief Elementary School had an enrollment of 864, with 154 in exceptional programs: 54 African-American, 2 American

Indian, 2 Asian, 20 Hispanic, and 67 White. These county sites were chosen because they reflected similar population sizes with the largest and smallest percentages of exceptional children, according to data obtained from an administrator in the district's Department of Evaluation and Research. Both elementary schools were located within the same county in central North Carolina.

Table 3.3 distinguishes the profound disproportion of identified students in special education programs by race exemplifies the overrepresentation and disproportion.

Table 3.3: Students Services by Percentage(s) at Both Schools

School Aspire Total: 832

Student Population by Races: 2010-2011			Number of Students in Exceptional Program(s)	
American Indian/Alaska Native:	5	0.6%	1	20.00%
Asian:	2	0.3%	1	50.00%
Hispanic:	69	8.3%	11	15.94%
Black:	119	14.3%	36	30.25%
White:	599	72.2%	15	0.25%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander:	0	0.0%	0	0.00%
Two or More Races:	36	4.3%	1	0.03%
Total	832		65	0.08%
Lunch Program:				
Free Lunch Program Eligible:	379	45.60%		
Reduced-Price Lunch Program Eligible:	66	8.0%		

School Belief Total: 864

Student Population by Races: 2010-2011			Number of Students in Exceptional Program(s)	
American Indian/Alaska Native:	3	0.4%	2	66.66%
Asian:	11	1.5%	2	18.18%
Hispanic:	76	8.9%	22	28.94%
Black:	87	9.1%	55	63.21%
White:	638	74.1%	67	10.50%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander:	0	0.0%	0	0
Two or More Races:	49	6.0%	6	12.24%
Total	864	100.00%	154	17.82%
Lunch Program:				
Free Lunch Program Eligible:	107	12.30%		
Reduced-Price Lunch Program Eligible:	16	.18%		

School Aspire, although overrepresented by African-American students to their White counterparts 30.25% : .25% indicates an apparent disconnect. Although This school had a lower percentage of African-American students in the exceptional children’s program than School Belief, having a 63.21%:10.50% ratio, there still was cause for further investigation.

The overt initial difference between School Aspire's 30.25% to School Belief's 63.21% was a vast difference, there was still the issue of underrepresentation of the White students at both sites. Such a discovery was a dismal revelation which was being addressed with more fervor at School Aspire, as principal A-1 stated, “ There are way too many minority children receiving special education services. We need to really dig deeper and find root cause...not attempt to fix it with a band-aid approach!”

Principal B-1 stated that she was quite aware of the ongoing discrepancies and her school is constantly working on improving the proportions. When this researcher asked the steps that they are taking, the principal spoke in generalities, “We offer tutoring, extra help in assisting parents, and any other type(s) of additional help needed.” She did not name specifics but spoke of offerings at the county level. When I asked if the parents are aware of such opportunities, the principal stated that fliers go home for them to read. Our discussion did not expand from that point.

If a strategy is not working, it either needs revision or replacement, and not denial or being discounted. The children are realizing the self fulfilling prophecy of early failure in school with a minimal chance for improvement.

Interviews

This case study explored two elementary schools within the same county with similar population sizes having a significantly differential range of children placed in special-education classrooms (predominantly minorities). Eight to twelve teachers from each grade level as well as special education teachers were invited to participate in the study. The size of the group best suited the need of this study to best reflect and represent the pool of educators who affected the students to the greatest degree. The selections was made under the advisement of the administrator(s) and department chair(s) from each school (snowball sampling), as he/she had the greatest understanding of the dynamics within the academic and social culture within each school.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, and counselors from both schools, as well as the county administrator for special programs. Once I received on-site administrative approval, this researcher sent an introductory email to all grade-level chairs (kindergarten through fifth grade at both schools) and five special-education teachers at both schools, describing the research and requesting their participation. I requested that they supply me with general data regarding their background, years of service, how many students they taught, etc. (Table 3.2). The participants were then asked to participate in an initial interview at the school site and possibly a second interview at that same site.

Individual interviews and any follow-up interviews were audiotaped. Anonymity had

been preserved throughout this study, and all documentation were kept in a secure location until the conclusion of the study, at which point all data was then destroyed.

I held one face-to-face interview with each teacher at both school sites. This allowed observation of the teachers' behaviors and body language individually. I also visited their classrooms to observe their response to the children. I worked on building a trusting relationship, granting me greater occasions for collecting data during our meetings.

Personal spoken accounts were seen as having central importance in social research because of their capacity to clarify meaning (Hammersley & Atkins, 1995). Individual, personal accounts demonstrated the language that people used and the emphases they provided, allow them to give precise explanations for their actions and judgments. The in-depth interview was similar to a “conversation with a purpose” (Webb & Webb, 1932, p. 130). In-depth interviews were lengthy, focused, and private. They provided an opportunity to collect rich and detailed data, with the research interviewer “mining” the subject and encouraging the participant to give successively more depth to their responses. Personal interviews were ideal for an in-depth exploration of a subject, which gave this researcher detailed insight into the participant’s own world; his or her beliefs, experiences, and feelings; and the explanations provided for his or her own actions or beliefs. Such interviews also afforded them a greater opportunity for exploring more complex processes for supplementary decision-making. A good research interviewer would build a rapport with the participant, which promoted the exploration of sensitive, painful, or difficult subjects. In-depth

interviews were usually tape-recorded. It allowed everything said to be reviewed in context. Note-taking was not sufficient enough to capture data in enough depth: the nuances and details, which constituted the richness of interview data, would be lost and the effort required in keeping pace with the respondent would impede the interview interaction.

Classroom Observations

This researcher performed direct classroom observations. There was a checklist separated by domains, dimensions, and indicators below. It was formerly called The CLASS conceptual framework for classroom interactions. This guided the observations to be as objective as possible. This researcher standardized the results. There was a 30-minute non-participatory observation(s) with two selected teachers chosen from both School Aspire and Belief to be involved in follow-up interview(s).

Using the observation template in Figure 3.1, the observations were recorded in all domains/subdomains in order to maintain an impartial format from which coding proved easier to obtain. As a prescribed rubric, the observer was able to jot down notations during the observation(s) within set parameters, allowing for post-observation comparisons and contrasts between/among teachers observed. There was a focus on “how” students were treated within each class. This treatment percolated throughout the entire school culture, as well as in each classroom, isolating what evolved within the culture in each room as an integral part of the entire school’s cultural machine. Isolating positive and negative practices helped reveal the overall functioning of the school as well as the variables that created its

overall culture. Figure 3.1 defined and segregated behaviors, allowing the researcher to tease out classroom behaviors/beliefs that perpetrated both school cultures.

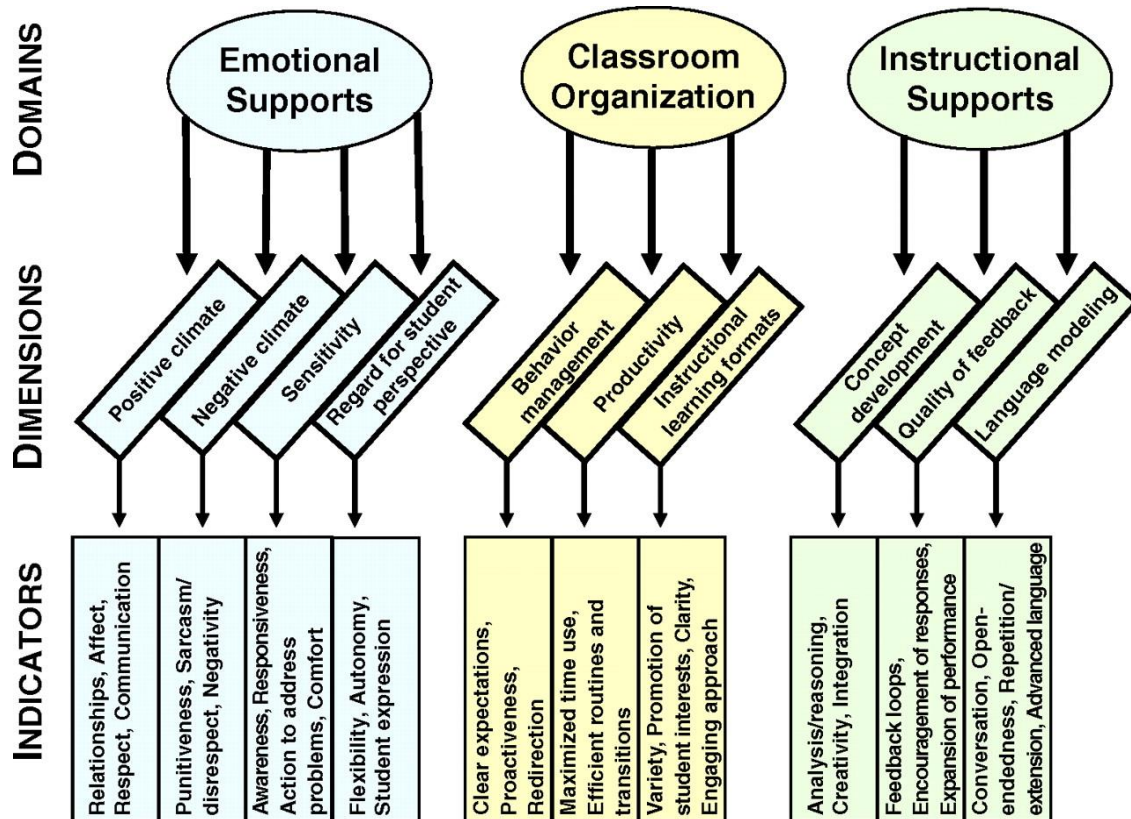


Figure 3.1: Observation Template

Researcher's Role

I, as the researcher, had been the exclusive investigator in this study. This researcher had 20 years of experience working in education, all in special education. I was at ease

working with faculty and did not have difficulty establishing confidence and affinity with the participants. Glesne (1999) mentioned two roles that a researcher played in a qualitative study: researcher as researcher and researcher as learner. The researcher-as-researcher role would gather data through interviews, make observations, and conduct thorough data analysis. The researcher as learner would evaluate the gathered research. According to Merriam (1988), “The importance of the researcher in qualitative case study cannot be overemphasized. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or machines” (p. 19).

The researcher-as-learner role included having an awareness of self—commencing at the start of the inquiry. Recognizing any of the researcher’s biases and predispositions in thought aided the investigator in becoming a “curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants” (Glesne, 1999, p. 41). I, as the researcher, was a thoughtful and diligent listener in order to learn from the participants instead of approaching the interviews as an expert. Being a researcher as learner continually exposed the investigator to innovative notions and methods of looking at the data. Glesne (1999) pointed out that in considering validity issues, it was important to recognize not only the researcher’s expertise in regards to the study, but also his or her “subjective relationship to the research topic” (p. 17). In qualitative research, bias was not controlled in an attempt to keep it out of the study, but as Glesne (1999) stated:

One of the ways a researcher can monitor subjectivity is through the use of a researcher's journal, an activity this researcher will engage in throughout the study. The researcher's expertise and extensive experience in the special-, as well as the regular-, education classroom environment will facilitate her ability to gather rich data sources; analyze the data to find common patterns and emerging themes across the cases. The researcher's monitoring and use of her subjectivity will permit her to tell the story in meaningful, verifiable ways. (p. 17)

Data Collection Procedures

A protocol must be established for a case study (Yin, 2003). The protocol sustained a framework by which this researcher retained the subject(s) as the objective(s) of the case study, allowing for future replications, thus increasing its reliability. The first step in the process was to obtain permission from the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for permission to involve human participants in research. Once permission was obtained, the researcher then sought permission from the county school district and from each of the two individual school sites. It was necessary to request permission from one member of the staff/clerical for assistance in procuring documents and artifacts.

Once permission was obtained, initial requests by email were sent to special-education teachers, department chairs of all grade levels that represent each regular-education grade, the administrator, and the school counselor for individual permission to tape a

confidential and anonymous interview with each of them. This was achieved through permission of the county administrator at the district level for special education. The researcher then requested a site-based representative from both sites to make archival data available.

After data was collected at each site, an initial analysis determined themes across the two schools. Documents, artifacts, field notes, and interview transcripts had been color coded, representing themes. When further clarification of data was needed, further appointments/contacts occurred. Ultimately, a matrix was created displaying the varied themes among and between the schools and staff.

Data Analysis

According to Glesne (1999), data analysis “involved organizing what you had seen, heard, and read so that you could make sense of what you have learned” (p. 130) while conducting a study. “Working with data, you describe, create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to other stories” (p. 130). Data had been collected from the interviews, observations, and examination of documents and were stored on a computer database that was then organized under categories based on the emergent themes (Glesne, 1999). Data analysis used the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) allowing for themes and patterns to emerge from the multiple sources of evidence. Interview notes were read through from start to finish in order to establish a panoramic view of the data. Preliminary notes would be made in the margins. Based on an initial identification of themes,

the interview notes would then be cut into individual units of analysis and glued onto 4x6 index cards. Every card would then be marked according to emergent themes.

Yin (2003) cited four principles that support high-quality data analysis: (1) attend to all of the evidence, including considering all alternative interpretations and rival hypotheses, thus leaving no loose ends, (2) address all major rival interpretations, (3) focus on the most important issue in the study, and (4) use one's own prior, expert knowledge in the analysis. The pivotal questions considered revolved around the instructional and personal strategies used by teachers who were having fewer referrals to SST and lower numbers of students in special-education classrooms relative to other teachers.

A case-study design supported the study of contemporary events in their real-life settings, including the behaviors and techniques observed between teachers currently successful with low-income students, as it used multiple sources of evidence to enrich the study using triangulation of data for analysis, from field notes, charts, video tapes of direct classroom observations, and interviews of the teachers (Yin, 2003) and allowed for flexibility in continuous revisions as data was compiled. In this study, the classroom instructional and behavioral strategies used by these teachers were identified. Data interpretation and analysis involved evaluation of what people had said, looking for identifying patterns, putting together what was said in one place with what was said in another place, and integrating what different people had said (Patton, 2002). Document analysis referred to the use of a broad range of written, visual, and physical materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). I used this

document analysis technique when analyzing the information gathered during the individual interviews and the observations. A document analysis had been conducted throughout the study. Goals, lesson plans, memos and letters to parents, mission and vision statements, and school-improvement plans were analyzed to gain a better understanding of how educators determined which children were selected for special-education services

Data Analysis Procedures

The purpose of each interview was to record as fully and fairly as possible a particular interviewee's perspective. To ensure accuracy of the interviewee's thoughts and information, I used a tape recorder because it would not "tune out" conversations, change what had been said because of interpretation (either conscious or unconscious), or record words more slowly than they were spoken (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the recorder aided my collection of the information with minimal error in transcribing and interpreting.

In note-taking, I tried to record exact phrases and statements made by participants without interfering with the discussion. Notes were complete and useable in the event that the tape recorder stopped working. In addition, Morgan (1988) suggested that regardless of the method of data collection, the moderator should make field notes after each session to support data analysis.

Raw data was collected from each interview. My task was to prepare a statement regarding the collected data. The first step was to transcribe the entire interview. This provided a complete record of the discussion and facilitated analysis of the data. The next

step was to analyze the content of the discussion. The aim of this analysis was to look for trends and patterns that reappear within separate interviews. Kreuger (1988) suggested that content analysis begins with a comparison of the words used in the answer. I had to also consider the emphasis or intensity of the respondents' comments, the consistency of comments, and the specificity of responses in follow-up probes.

Additionally, I took meticulous and all-inclusive annotations throughout the interview process as an extra preventive measure in case the tape recorder malfunctioned. Patton (2002) explained that verbatim note taking can make it difficult for the interviewer to be attentive to the interviewee's needs and cues, and it interferes with listening attentively. Yet, notes have a variety of positive purposes. He described note taking as helping the interviewer formulate new questions as the interview progressed, aiding in probing to gain more crucial information. The interviews had been transcribed. Reading over the notes prior to completing the transcripts stimulated insights in future interviews. I explained to participants the purpose of the tape recorder and obtained their permission to use it. In regards to note taking, I needed to try to denote exact phrases and statements made by participants. The significance here was that the note taking should not interfere with the discussion. Notes had been completed and useable in the event the tape recorder stopped working. In addition, Morgan (1988) suggested that regardless of the method of data collection, the moderator should make field notes after each session to support data analysis.

As recommended by Patton (2002), Yin (1989), and Miles and Huberman (1994), I

recorded details about the setting and my observations about each interview immediately after the interviews concluded. These details included where the interview occurred, the conditions, and how the interviewee reacted to questions. I scheduled interviews and observations so that sufficient time would be available afterward for data clarification, elaboration, and evaluation.

Data and Document Analysis/Methods of Verification

Data interpretation and analysis construe what people have said by looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said (Patton, 2002). Document analysis refers to the use of a broad range of written, visual, and physical materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). I used this document analysis technique when analyzing the information gathered during the individual and focus-group interviews and the observations. A document analysis was conducted throughout the study. Goals, lesson plans, memos and letters to parents, mission and vision statements, and school improvement plans were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the determinants in how educators determine which children had been selected for special education services.

Research Validity and Reliability

This study utilized multiple sources of data collection, including individual interviews, observations, and document analysis (any anecdotal records of students at the school sites, school/psychological testing where the researcher gained access, student

permanent products from classroom assignments, IEPs, etc.). Triangulation aided in the validity of the study, assisted in avoiding biases that may have arisen through research, and lead to a better understanding of the findings. Triangulation also assisted in gathering information through multiple data sources (Glesne, 1999). Each source revealed different features of the study. “Studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks” (Patton, 2002, p. 306). In this study, these multiple sources were the county statistical information, the interview data, classroom observations, and discussion questions and concepts generated from the focus-group meetings at both school sites. These sources offered different viewpoints and the understanding of varied instructional strategies.

Having a background in education, I was able to comprehend and relate to a great deal of the issues discussed, and this aided in providing a clearer concept of the information. It could also have been a bias if I approached the students as such. Merriam (1998) emphasized that the researcher must be aware of any personal biases and how they may influence the investigation. As an educator, I believed all children have the ability to learn to their fullest potential. Therefore, I had a pre-existing theory that minority students could be successful in any program. The information that links their names to the codes were kept at my home until the research was completed, after which that information was destroyed. The participants were assured that the information would not be shared and used only for this educational process and not for any other purpose.

The reliability of the study was increased through the process of triangulation, where converging lines of inquiry were developed from multiple sources of evidence. Additionally, construct validity was addressed by providing multiple measures of the same phenomenon through multiple means (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2003). Glesne (1999) added that triangulation is a measure of validity through the “use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives” (p. 32).

In the creation of a case study database, the data had been organized to facilitate their review by other investigators. There were generally two separate collections of documentation that move into the database: the raw data (documents, investigator’s observation reports, and interview transcripts) and the report of the investigator. This study used a folder system on the computer to collect and store all of the data in various folders and on an Excel database to record events and categorize the data. The database contained the original interview notes, the researcher’s notes, and any artifacts submitted by the participants. Subfolders were used to organize the data. Maintaining a chain of evidence increased the reliability of the study by providing a way for an external investigator to “trace the steps in either direction (from conclusion back to initial research questions or from questions to conclusions)” (Yin, 2003, p. 105).

The ultimate chain of evidence desired was the ability to cross-reference amongst the case study report, the database, citations to specific sources in the database, the protocol, and the case study questions. This chain of evidence was scrupulously maintained throughout the

study and was included in the research report. To decrease possible bias, triangulation was employed. According to Merriam (1988), triangulation strengthens the reliability of case studies. In order to reinforce reliability, this researcher re-examined the data numerous times. I compared the interview notes with the audiotapes from the interviews for accuracy. This was a continual process. All of the participants were assured total anonymity throughout the study and the schools were to be assigned pseudonyms during the research, all information had been kept in a safe and secured place in researcher's home, and any information collected being destroyed once the research was completed. This was to maintained total anonymity, never allowing any one individual and the school in which they teach, to be associated with their responses. The teachers at each school were not made aware of the other teachers from their same school who were participating in the study. That ensured that the individual teachers did not consult each other, possibly persuading alternative answers to what they truly believed.

Table 3.4: Timeline

Question(s)	Data Collection	Timeline
	Proposal to dissertation committee	April, 2010
	Request sent to IRB	May, 2010
Years teaching Years at school Subject you teach Students in each class. Total number of labeled special education students you teach. Describe socio/economic and gender makeup of your classes	1. Initial requests for interviews (email): 2. Send questionnaire through email for data on teachers/general information: 3. Request to review archival data for school A and school B.	Fall, 2010
See Appendix A	Initial interviews Principals School A School B	Fall, 2011
See Appendix B	Interview School Counselors School A School B	Fall, 2011
See Appendix C	Interview County/district coordinator Special education	Fall, 2011
See Appendix D	Initial interviews School A Regular education teachers Special education teachers	Fall, 2011
See Appendix D	Initial interviews School B Regular education teachers Special education teachers	Spring, 2012
See Appendix D (same questions as initial but with greater investigation) Will have answers from each school A&B	Follow-up interviews	Fall, 2012
Chapters 4 and 5	Data collected/analyzed Disseminated/coded Chapters 4 and 5 completed	Spring, 2014

Ethical Issues

It was important to clarify how this researcher dealt with ethical issues presented within the study. There was the potential for racial/cultural sensitivity or misunderstandings. Throughout the study, certain guidelines were followed to ensure protection of the participants, to aid in validity of the data, and to minimize bias from my role as the researcher. The consent form further explained that interviews would be audiotaped, transcribed, kept in the secure possession of the researcher, and destroyed once the study was complete (see Appendix H).

Confidentiality and Participation

All information gathered during the study in interviews and observations was kept confidential. Only I, the researcher, had access to the consent form that links subjects' names with the participants' code numbers. Their identities were disguised through this specific coding.

To get more detailed information from the participants, they were audiotaped at the interview. Their names were pre-coded prior to the recording. This anonymous "code" tracked them throughout the study. The transcriptions were also coded to safeguard their confidentiality, adding an additional layer of protective classification.

The subject's confidentiality had been disregarded if there were any information regarding illegal activity, abuse, or neglect reported. Thankfully, none was found as I was obligated to report any such information to the appropriate personnel. At the conclusion of

this study, the information gathered and audiotapes, identifiable only by subject number and stored in a locked file, together with the key that relates their name with the assigned subject number, had been destroyed. The information obtained from this research was used for publication or educational purposes of this researcher only and not for any other purpose.

The participants were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The consent form explained the ethical issues and study procedures. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could, at any time during the study, decide to withdraw from the study without penalty (see Appendix H).

Informants were told that there was no potential physical or mental risk to them. They were advised that their role was simply to inform the study and their participation would be limited to exchanging information through interviews, observations, and discussions. There was no cost to the participants for being in this study. The participants were asked to share their thoughts and feelings with me. The benefit of their participation would be the contribution they will make toward helping to improve society as a whole.

The information in the study records was kept strictly confidential. Data were stored securely in a locked file box in the primary researcher's residence until the study was complete and were then destroyed. No reference would be made in oral or written reports that could have linked participants to the study.

Limitations of the Study

Constraints such as time, money, and resources made it unrealistic to conduct this

study with a larger population, which would limit the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the study. Therefore, purposeful sampling was the best type of sampling for this study. I selected two local schools within one school district in one county in the same state. Those sites assisted me in gathering information based upon their constraints and availability. This small sample size, using maximum variation sampling, limited the generalizability of the study's findings. Because I had conducted the research in elementary schools, this constituted the limitation of age grouping.

An additional limitation of this study was the bias of the sole researcher. As a special-education teacher with 20 years of experience in a variety of special-education settings, this researcher had subjectivity when it comes to a "bell curve" mentality. Many students arrived at school deficient in many areas of knowledge through no fault of their own, and was the initial step in creating additional difficulties. The classroom teacher in the regular setting was obligated to use his or her skills, practices, and belief systems to give those children the impetus to achieve to their potential.

This study was also limited to staff at the elementary level within one county in the Piedmont area of North Carolina, which provided a small constituency of staff for me to interview. Also, this study was not differentiated in any specified way by gender although the participants were all female, with the male head of the county's exceptional children's program,

Summary

This chapter described the methodology and explicit procedures that was used in conducting this case study of which beliefs and practices foster or inhibit the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special-education classes.

The methodology was qualitative in nature and was incorporated in a case-study design. Interviews and school-site documents and artifacts constituted the primary data sources. Researcher field notes served as the secondary data source. All data accumulated was analyzed for similarities and differences in approaches at each school and with teachers' way(s) of thinking.

The next chapter presents the findings within each school and the overall similarities and differences that may reveal the reason for disparity between schools in the percentage of minority children in special education.

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction/Overview

This was a multiple case study conducted at two traditional calendar elementary schools (one k-6 and one k-8) within the same Piedmont county in North Carolina. These two schools met the criteria for the study, which consisted of conducting research at two schools (k-6 and k-8) and with the county's exceptional children's administrator at the central office in the same county. It was also important to remember in addition to understanding the definition of success that the terms economically disadvantaged (ED), free and reduced lunch (FR/L), and low-income are used synonymously in describing the student population in this study.

Findings/Research Question(s)

The central research question guiding the study was: What fosters or inhibits the over identification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special education classes? In addition, the following subquestions were explored:

1. What is your school's policy (practice) on initially requesting identifying/testing a particular child? Is there any set of particular "written" policy?
2. What role do teachers, school counselors, and school administrators' beliefs and practices play in the identification and referral of students for special education services?

3. What role does each of these participants play in recommending or assigning students to special education?

Observation Findings

Observation of teacher A-5 : This is a regular education grade 3 classroom. There were 19 children in attendance. The classroom was set up with desks grouped in fours, There are two additional tables, one in a kidney shape. They are in the back of the room.

The students came in quietly and went directly to their seats. They were relatively attentive when the teacher asked them to open their math books. She had the overhead on and began reviewing the homework. During the process, she made certain all of the children understood the assignment. One boy raised his hand and needed further explanation regarding regrouping. She reviewed it and probed for understanding. Suddenly there was giggling and as she turned around a pencil was thrown passed her. She immediately called a student's name and asked him to sit at the kidney table. He needed two warnings and then moved. This was done without a class disruption. She proceeded to discuss the current day's assignment. She explained the directions and had each group of 4 work in teams. Each table had manipulatives and extra paper to work out the problems. She then went to the boy at the kidney table and they conversed quietly. He then returned to his seat. She proceeded to walk from group to group and assist as needed.

Emotional Domains: There was a positive climate in the class. The teacher was respectful to all of the children. She dealt with the only misbehavior observed in a professional manner.

The children followed the behavioral expectations that have been in place.

Classroom organization: The class knew what was expected of them. The materials were easily handy. The teacher put the materials on each desk. When they were done, she had each table “captain” put them back in their appropriate place.

Instructional supports: The teacher presented the lesson plan with the initial instruction and probed them for understanding. If there was any confusion, she would answer the question(s) thoroughly and reprobe for understanding.

Observation of teacher A-6: This is a resource class for grades k-3. The students all have IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) which are specific to the needs of each child. At the time of the observation there were 4 students present. This was a reading class using direct instruction. Two of the students were in grade 1 and two were in grade 2. The students came in quietly and went directly to their seat(s) at a kidney shaped table in the back of the room.

Emotional domains: One of the students was very talkative, and after two warnings, the teacher had him move to a separate table. She gave him seatwork while she was teaching the lesson to the others. He began to shout and got up from his seat throwing crayons on the floor. She immediately went to the phone and had an administrator come for him. This took approximately five minutes. During that time there was little, if any learning going on. All the attention was placed on the one student.

Classroom organization: The classroom was well organized. Supplies were at hand. As this is direct instruction it is clear, concise, and prescribed text.

Instructional supports: All appropriate steps are included in the program and were all appropriately followed.

Note: After the disruptive student was removed, the class progressed with the lesson with no more interruptions.

Observation of teacher B-3: This is a regular education grade 5 classroom. There were 27 children present.. As the children entered the majority of them were very loud. The teacher was at her desk and only acknowledged the children that came over to her. They were taking a math test on the day I observed. She got up from her desk and walked to the front of the room. The desks were in rows. She instructed them to take out their “offices,” which were manila folders that gave each student the ability to cover their papers. As she was handing out the tests, there was continual chatter. She did not address this immediately. As the noise grew she appeared to get upset. She went to the door and slammed it to get their attention. Two of the boys laughed when she did that. She then addressed the class, “If you have any questions raise your hand. If I see you cheating in any way you will get a 0!” The class became quiet and she rotated around the room. There were no more distractions throughout the observation.

Emotional domains: Behavioral expectations were not observed. The teacher did not address improprieties immediately but, rather, waited until she was utterly disgusted and then reacted.

Classroom organization: The room did not observe efficient routines. There were many children in the room which made it a difficult task for the teacher to maintain a specific

standard.

Instructional supports: It appeared that there was a lack of respect with minimal feedback offered.

Observation of teacher B-4: This is a resource class for grades 3-5. The students all have IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) which are specific to the needs of each child. At the time of the observation there were 5 students present. One was in grade 3 and 4 were in grade 4. There were all on the same reading level. They were using the level 2 Reading Mastery books. All of the students entered quietly. The teacher spoke with each child as they came in the door, asking them how they are. Each child responded back.

Emotional domains: This class was well managed and well behaved.

Classroom organization: Extremely productive

Instructional supports: Immediate supportive feedback given

This was a direct Instruction reading class. The students were in SRA Reading Mastery 2. As this program is scripted, it is easily followed. This teacher addressed each student and his/her needs immediately.

Results

The sections below summarized the themes that emerged from the analyses of the interviews, organized into seven sections. Initial analyses showed that the perspectives of the two respondent groups, School Aspire, School Belief, and the central office personnel tended to be more similar than different on most of the themes. Responses from all groups were

included within each theme; any differences that emerged between subgroups of respondents were described specifically. All responses were attributed to respondent groups and the gender and race of each respondent is specified for each.

Table 4.1: Personal Characteristics of Study Participants

A (k-8) or B (k-6) determines school. Number following letter indicates participant.

Demographic Characteristics of Schools A, B, and Central Office Administrator

Position in school/county	Years in education	Gender	Race	Graduate Degree	Age	Number of students
Exceptional Student Director	20	male	White	yes	42	n/a
Principal School A (A-1)	25	female	African American	yes	48	n/a
Guidance Counselor (A-2)	9	female	African American	yes	31	varies
Regular Education teacher School A (A-3)	29	female	African American	yes	52	Varies curriculum coach
Regular Education teacher School A Grade 4 (A-4)	19	female	White	yes	41	21
Regular Education teacher School A Grade 3 (A-5)	29	female	White	yes	51	19
Exceptional Education teacher School A (A-6)	21	female	White	yes	44	L DResource K-3
Exceptional Education teacher School (A-7)	14	female	White	yes	37	Self-contained
Exceptional Education teacher School A(A-8)	8	female	African American	yes	31	LD resource varies
Speech Pathologist (A-9)	14	female	White	yes	54	varies
Principal School B (B-1)	29	female	White	yes	51	n/a
Regular Education Teacher grade3 (B-2)	12	female	White	yes	34	21
Regular Education Teacher grade5 (B-3)	5	female	White	yes	33	27
Exceptional Education Teacher (B-4)	27	female	White	yes	49	varies
Exceptional Education Teacher (B-5)	15	female	White	yes	37	varies

Theme 1: Regular Education Teachers Rush to Judgement

Given multiple sources of unequal schooling, the National Research Council (2002) panel found affirmative evidence that schooling independently contributes to the unequal rates of achievement that predict minority disproportionality in special education. Participants in this study echoed some of these same themes, chief among them the contribution of a cultural mismatch regarding social behavior. Hosp and Hosp (2002) concluded that there is evidence of such a distinct African American behavioral style in schools. If the respondents were correct, it was not uncommon for teachers unfamiliar or uncomfortable with that behavioral style to react in ways that were educationally unproductive (e.g., Townsend, 2000).

Such an hypothesis was congruent with particularly high disproportionality in the emotionally disturbed category. One of the more interesting findings of the current study was the widely held belief among respondents that accountability testing created pressures that increased inappropriate referrals to special education. Heubert (2002) noted that although high-stakes testing could be expected to have a strong impact on the achievement of students of color, it was not clear whether that impact will be positive or negative. On the one hand, pressures on schools and classrooms created by a strong focus on accountability had the potential to strengthen both teacher training and classroom instruction.

Accountability testing represented a fundamentally different kind of contributing factor to minority disproportionality in special education. In general, the variables identified

as possible general education contributions to disproportionality by both my respondents and the available research (e.g., National Research Council, 2002) was directly related to resource deficits at the classroom, school, or district level. High-stakes and minimum competency testing, however, had been driven by national and state-level policy choices. In this case, it was possible that a key national policy choice, accountability testing, could conflict with another federal priority, the importance of reducing the disproportionate placement of minority students in special education.

The staff members that were interviewed described, often in stark detail, their perceptions of the strong contribution of factors associated with poverty as a detriment in regards to a child's school readiness. As principal B-1 stated, "Many of our children entering kindergarten have not been exposed to an enriching environment. This is typical of our students coming from a lower socio-economic environment. It is very difficult for them to catch up with their counterparts that have more at their disposal." Almost universally, respondents commented on the impact of poverty on students in their schools. A number of respondents suggested that norms of violence in some communities may teach children survival skills, such as aggression, that may be ill-suited to school settings. Several respondents remarked on how differences in the way in which schools interact with poor and minority students and their families might contribute to incidences of special education referrals. Of these, problems related to classroom management were most often cited by school personnel. There were a number of interviewees (principal A-1, guidance counselor

A-2, regular education teacher A-5, principal B-1, exceptional teacher B-4, and exceptional teacher B-5) who equated a national policy choice with the strong contribution to minority disproportionality in special education: high-stakes testing and accountability. Despite recent state and federal changes that have mandated the inclusion of students with disabilities in high-stakes testing, respondents still believe that standardized testing creates pressure on teachers and parents to refer students to special education. As the expectations for children have grown enormously, if children aren't attaining the standards the feds and state think should occur many stressed regular education teachers feel tremendous pressure to get kids to a certain, predetermined level. Sample quotes include: "We are held accountable if our students do not score a 3 or 4 on end of grade tests. The blame lands on us" (exceptional teacher B-5). "How can these legislators find fault with us if not all of our students pass the end of grade tests? The fact that the majority pass...does say we are doing something right" (classroom teacher A-3). "I think that standardized testing tests a student's ability to take tests, not so much their knowledge in a particular subject. The purpose of getting grades in the first place is to let each teacher individually assess the abilities of each student. By definition if kids passed their classes they were ready for the next level. What can be done to stop faulting teachers if any of their students get a 1 or a 2" (exceptional teacher A-6)?

Is the answer early intervention? Within Wise County the issue has been addressed. Intercede to Succeed (ITS), in partnership with the schools, families, and community, is an early intervention literacy program committed to promoting the academic, social, and

emotional growth of first and second grade students. ITS develops skills and resources which can be used throughout education by strengthening families and promoting current resources in the community which may be under utilized. Intercede To Succeed teachers work with individuals and small groups to develop reading and writing skills, and to encourage greater enthusiasm for learning.

Wise County also initiated The Literature Enhancement Initiative which enriches the students' exposure to children's literature and promotes the development of life-long learners. Volunteer tutors provide valuable assistance with directed reading and writing practice. Individual conference, home visits, and small parent groups encourage parental involvement in education and assist parents with other related needs in their families. Interagency cooperation reduces fragmentation of services and provides a more inviting approach to service delivery.

With the aforementioned programs, children with deficiencies are assisted in learning the necessary initial academic expectations as set forth within the schools.

There are standard expectations for kindergarteners which include the following:

- Alphabet knowledge: Recognizing and naming all upper- and lower-case letters,
- Phonological awareness: Knowing letter–sound correspondences, blending sounds, identifying beginning and ending sounds, recognizing and producing rhymes and alliteration, isolating sounds,
- Print and book concepts: Understanding that print carries meaning; Understanding

that books are read from front to back, and that print is read from left to right, and from the top to the bottom of the page,

- Word recognition: Reading simple one-syllable and high-frequency words,
- Comprehension,
- Making predictions by using titles, illustrations, prior knowledge, and story segments to anticipate book content,
- Asking and answering questions during story book sharing,
- Retelling stories or events in accurate sequences,
- Connecting book content to life experiences,
- Distinguishing different literary forms, such as fiction, nonfiction, newsletters, signs, lists,
- Writing (upper- and lower-case letters),
- Using a variety of strategies for writing including drawing, pre-phonemic spelling, phonemic spelling, and known words.

Through research, observations, and interviews, I saw differences in the overall attitudes of the regular education teachers expressed by the regular education teachers at the two schools:

School Aspire:

- All children start school with the ability to learn. (Stated by A1, A3, A4)
- We must assess and find ways to narrow and close any gaps. (Stated by A1, A2, A3, A4, A5)

- Early intervention programs help children that may come to school with deficiencies. These programs also help their self-esteem. (Stated by A1, A2, A3, A7, A9)

School Belief:

- If the students are at a disadvantage academically when they start school; therefore we can only do a certain amount in a regular classroom. (Stated by B3, B4, B5)
- Some families need to do a better job of helping their children get ready for kindergarten. (Stated by B1, B2, B3, B4)
- Early intervention is available but many parents feel that the school should do it all and not expect outside sources to assist. (Stated by B1, B2, B4)

All children of appropriate age are “ready” for kindergarten although some may need extra attention. The regular education teachers must work together with families to ease transition. In theory and practice, the students should be treated the same and the teachers must help those who are different, assisting them in adjusting to the normed expectations, and to develop and apply strategies to overcome their limitations. By teaching all children to embrace their own uniqueness and respect their differences, it enables them to prepare for a diverse world with the skillset to adjust when necessary.

There are some teachers that feel student diversity means lower performance. Regular classroom teacher B-3 stated, “I typically see minority children not perform as well. Is it me

or them?” Student diversity is challenging, but can be beneficial for all children. Although universal screening procedures provide data to determine a child’s readiness for kindergarten there are interpretations of segregating by ability into defined groups. It is a wiser practice to use the data derived from those screening procedures to assist in determining instructional practices, as well as the need for additional assessments and possible supportive services.

When communication with families is only limited towards the start of school, there needs to be an ongoing open door policy, inviting the parents and the entire community to become involved with school events, providing multiple opportunities for children, families, and the community at large to visit the school.

The learning environment should not solely support the “typical” student but be prepared to support the learning and development of all children. “Teachers need both preservice and ongoing training to become more culturally competent. It is so important in order to understand the challenges of the students that are culturally different than they are and understand them within the proper cultural context. The teachers need to become more aware of their own cultural beliefs and practices, as well as the misconceptions of those from other cultures, and reassess their conclusions” (principal A-1).

“The most important variable is to establish the best student-teacher-family relationship possible, as well as encompassing the subject matter and classroom interaction(s). Watching student interaction allows the teacher to develop new, more effective strategies instead of wanting the child to fit and react within a preconceived mold”

(classroom teacher A-2). This belief was restated by exceptional teacher B-4, “If we spot a deficiency, we should never assume the child can't do it. We need to develop a strategy to help him/her gain self esteem and a greater ability to figure the problem out. If the student needs more assistance, he should not be penalized!”

When determining a child's readiness and ability at the start of his/her school career, one must not allow it to be solely determined by standard assessment tools. Although there is a role for standard school-wide assessments during the kindergarten year, the course of action is to clearly define the purpose of such assessments and to conscientiously plan how the data should be collected and what will be done with the information.

As the students' culture(s) and home language(s) greatly impact their performance on assessments it must be taken into account when selecting assessments and interpreting the results. Their cultural experiences display what they know; how they demonstrate knowledge and abilities, and the way they will respond to assessment situations. Additionally, their home language(s) impact how they understand assessment directions and how they communicate their responses. Assessments must be sensitive to these issues.

Additionally, cultural and linguistic biases can influence the assessment data collection process. Any measure, no matter how well designed or how valid and reliable, is produced within a particular cultural and linguistic context. The types of skills assessed, the way information is collected, and the importance placed upon particular items, skills, and/or developmental domains are all impacted by the cultural and linguistic background of the

assessment development process. Bias can be present in the assessment instruments as most standardized assessments have been designed within the middle-class, English-speaking, Caucasian culture. Schools must be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic background of the children they will be assessing and use every strategy possible to ensure that assessments are appropriate for their children. If a school system is using standardized assessments, they should be developed specifically for the population and validated to ensure that they provide comparable information with the version developed in understandable English. “Even though we all speak the English language, many of my minority students do not always understand me. How can they do well on standardized tests if they are struggling with my vernacular in the classroom? (classroom teacher B-3). “Many of my minority students have a great deal of depth of understanding, receptively. The problem is their expressive ability. It is a constant struggle that never seems to end. How can they succeed if the playing field is not level? (regular classroom teacher A-5).

The assessments should be normed with groups similar to the students in the school (reliability and validity have been established with children from the same—or as similar as possible—culture and language backgrounds). The tests should be administered by persons who can read and speak the child’s native language fluently. Non-standardized or informal assessments should also accommodate the child’s home language and culture. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and the results indicate a self-fulfilling prophecy where the more successful assessments are achieved by the group it was created to and for, the White middle

class.

The best way to create a greater understanding for the cultural mismatch between teacher and student must be initiated by the teacher and staff at the school. Principal A-1 stated, “The staff must ask themselves a few questions: 1) What is your own culture in with regards to education, interactions and school? (values, beliefs, traditions, and customs); 2) What is the historic experience(s) of your culture in the scope of the worldview?; 3) What are the differences between your culture and the student’s and their families? and 4) Are you expecting a specific accommodation from the student for any cultural differences? There are so many underlying stereotypes and biases we, as educators are either unaware of or have not yet addressed. We stress this collective understanding in an effort to set expectations for our teachers to be as sensitive for the needs of our children, maintaining the greatest degree of objectivity.”

If such high standards are in place, the children that initially begin school, coming from a diverse background, will be met with a greater understanding and compassion, allowing them to gain self-esteem and attain the greatest degree of success that they can, barring cultural variations from that of the cultural, standard norm in the classroom and school.

As the regular education teacher is the initial contact a child has in school it is the teacher's professional obligation to assist that child in his quest for knowledge. No two children come to school with the same knowledge base, nor do they learn at the same rate

with the same cognition, but that is the challenge and the joy(s) of teaching children. They are not to be moved to a more restrictive environment unless deemed necessary by failing to thrive and grow within that setting.

Theme 2: Exceptional Education Teachers not to be Considered Babysitters

The process that begins when a teacher considers referring a student to special education and continues until that student is deemed either eligible or ineligible for services is highly complex. Respondents in this study identified a number of points in the referral-to-placement process that may contribute to an increased likelihood of minority referral to special education. Teachers, administrators, and the school counselor were all disgruntled about the immensity of process in special education, but on the positive side, it may ensure fewer referrals to special education. In addition, the responses of the interviewees noted a serious gap between the level and types of classroom behavior that classroom teachers face and their preparation and resources for addressing that behavior. Finally, the data suggested that prereferral teams may or may not contribute to the reduction of minority overreferral. In School Aspire, teachers believed such a team is beneficial for their students; in School Belief, the teams appeared to be viewed as an additional administrative obstacle to be cleared prior to actual referral. Obviously, further investigation would be paramount to explore the school or classroom characteristics that may make prereferral teams more or less effective (Whitten & Dieker, 1995).

Teachers at both schools held beliefs regarding the value of special education referral

and disproportionality in referral that appear to run contrary to generally held perspectives in policy and research. Both research and policy perspectives on minority disproportionality in special education (e.g., Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Losen & Orfield, 2002; National Research Council, 2002) view the disproportionate referral of poor and minority children to special education as a cause for serious concern. The special education director in this county this shared that concern, viewing overreferral as a negative for his district. But among classroom teachers, special education was almost universally viewed as a valuable, and sometimes the only, resource for students with learning and behavior problems.

If anything, teachers preferred to err on the side of overreferral rather than underreferral in order to ensure that needy students received any and all resources for which they might qualify. Debates about whether special education is effective (Finn, Rotherham, & Hokanson, 2001; National Research Council (2002) seem to matter less to these teachers than the simple fact that it is there for those who need it. “If a student is to be referred for special education testing after we attempted RtI interventions, let it happen if the end result allows him to become successful” (classroom teacher B-3). In opposition, classroom teacher A-5 stated, “Many of the students in the RtI process are successful, given the assistance of the RtI team and the teacher. It is not an easy task but if we collaborate there is a better chance for the student to remain in the regular education setting. Only as a last resort should we proceed with a Dec 1 and 2...asking parents permission to begin the process of testing for placement in special ed.” Two teachers from two different schools have polar opposite views.

Is it individual bias, school culture, or both? “This becomes a dilemma for the special education teacher. Has the student truly made minimal process through RtI or has the regular education teacher just given up? (exceptional teacher A-8).

Concerns regarding minority disproportionality in special education, there has been a strong focus on the possible contribution of the processes of referral, assessment, and decision making that lead to eligibility determination. The process, once deplete of cultural misunderstandings and ethno-centric White European values would be sound and not make an appreciable contribution to disparities in placement. The RtI process has imbedded an overarching set of expectations that could assist in keeping children in the regular education setting and tease out individual subjectivity(ies).

It is a constant challenge for the regular education teacher. As the kindergarten class is the primary entering point for all, it is crucial that there is a standard by which to forestall immediate segregation by test and cultural determinants. The regular education teacher must concede that differences matter. It is imperative for him/her to abandon norms that rely on White, middle-class standards as benchmarks of success. Instead, teachers must implement work from a culturally relevant stance. “Teachers need to understand the acceptable cultural norms that set up in students’ cultures and lives. That is the best way to see things through the student's perspective” (exceptional teacher A-7).

As principal A-1 stated, “If we interact with the students in a more natural setting that they are familiar with, it will improve teachers’ ability to differentiate between behaviors that

are meant to be disruptive instead of behaviors with cultural roots. It could help teachers to greater understand what the child does and why he does it. This is commonly seen as the job of the special education teacher because the regular classroom teacher had not developed this more individualized sensitivity to the need(s) of each child. College preparatory classes in special education stress this more. It needs to be in the regular education curriculum as well.”

As my teacher preparation classes in special education can attest, it is a constant challenge to look at a student through the most objective of lenses and the better training one receives, the better performance one will execute. In an attempt to keep students in the regular classroom, only suggesting more restrictive settings, the teacher must relinquish preconceived notions of what determines success in their eyes. Strategies need to be implemented and practiced to potentially forestall placement in special education. The RtI process is a measure that helps to ensure a greater degree in applying the existing deficient dynamic with that of predetermined expectation(s). It affords the child who is struggling with expected classroom academic and behaviors to be shaped, through interventions, and assisted, affording them the greatest degree of success in remaining within the regular classroom culture.

Special education programs at both schools offer tremendous opportunities for students that need to be placed in a more restrictive setting in order to either catch up with their peers or make strides at their own pace. The smaller classroom setting with a lower teacher to student ratio is not to be considered a “daycare” for certain students. It is now within the

regular education classroom the tools for the RtI program. The regular educator must now reconsider the greater impact of referring a child and shortchanging that child by pushing for referral to test into an special education program.

Theme 3: Are There Enough Resources?

To better understand the relationship between special education referral, diversity, and resources, interviewees were asked about available resources and resources that they felt could make a difference in supporting diversity in the classroom. Four subthemes emerged: classroom accommodations, needed resources, prereferral teams, and special education as the primary resource. As noted, the vast majority of school personnel felt that resources were insufficient to meet the needs of their students. A number of respondents blamed inadequate educational funding for that shortfall of resources (classroom teachers A3, A5, A6, A7, B3, B4, and B5). “There are times when I have to purchase specific items for my students and it becomes a financial burden. But, I feel it is my obligation, if it enhances the learning process” (exceptional teacher B5). “How many times the teachers pool resources to create whatever is needed, like pulling a rabbit out of a hat, in order to teach a lesson. I bring in items from home. The schools do not supply everything” (classroom teacher A-4). This is a recurring scenario as classroom accommodations can be exhaustive, both monetarily and time wise, especially if you have a class of more than 20 students.

Prereferral teams and assistance from special education teachers offer the overworked regular classroom teachers needed assistance and support. Once these issues are addressed,

there is less focus on the stress and expectations and more on attaining positive results.

When asked, many teachers stated that there is a need for additional interventions (classroom teachers A-3, A-4, A-6, A-7, B-3, B-4, and B-5), including parent support for families, hiring instructional coaches to better understand how to meet the needs of diverse learners, more remedial services, a Web site with a bank of differentiated instructional lessons, and a full-time counselor. To reiterate, the single resource identified most frequently as needed to address the types of problems that the interviewees identified was early intervention.

As early intervention is key to assisting children as soon as it is needed has been shown time and time again to helping the child entering school on an uneven “playing field” with few resources available at home, it is paramount that those children receive an adequate amount of assistance in “catching up” and giving them a fair chance at doing their best in school. It also improves their self esteem which they carry through to adulthood.

Theme 4: The Misperceptions of Minority Disproportionality and Diversity

From the broad perspective of policy, the overuse of special education for students of color constitutes a serious problem demanding remediation. For teachers facing academic and social problems among the students in their classrooms, however, referral to special education is primarily a method of providing additional resources for any student who is struggling: For most of the classroom teacher interviewed, the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education appeared to be a topic that had not

been previously considered. This absence of discussion on the topic is part of the issue. The primary step in taking positive action requires discussion and input from all stakeholders. Some teachers expressed a strong personal commitment to teaching students about diversity and building an accepting and tolerant community in their classroom. Although less common, I also heard less tolerant perspectives on racial and ethnic diversity. I was very surprised by the degree of racial stereotyping in some of the responses. At School Belief. I was present at recess and witnessed three white teachers scolding African American boys for showing aggressive behavior while shooting hoops while White boys, who were just as aggressive, were not spoken to. The fact that three teachers were involved reinforced the conclusion that this is an unstated assumption by the white teachers, that children of color are inherently more aggressive, while the children of their similar background(s) were not. This was not the case. Another instance was observed in the cafeteria as students at a few tables were particularly loud. The two white teacher(s) on duty (not part of this study) addressed the noise issue towards the tables consisting of primarily African American students. The tables with primarily White students were not redirected. Both administrators and teachers believed that African American students were overreferred as a result of behavior and that some of the reason for that was a cultural mismatch or perhaps insufficient training.

The initial step in resolving problems is dealing with them in an honest and upfront fashion. I had seen too many teacher stating that they had no biases when, in fact, some reactions to students were overt. Those teachers need to self assess and truthfully appraise

how they act and what they say. It is difficult to be objective with oneself but it is necessary.

Theme 5: Difficulty in Speaking About Race

One of the more unexpected themes that emerged from these conversations was a reticence in discussing the topic of race. One of the more unexpected themes that emerged from these conversations was a reticence in discussing the topic of race. In general, I found that, particularly for White respondents, race proved a difficult topic to speak about. Administrators who generally impressed this researcher with their practical eloquence on a variety of topics became tongue-tied or taciturn when the conversation turned explicitly to race. Some teachers who demonstrated great precision in describing the disadvantages and educational needs of their students became unexpectedly vague when asked for details about the ethnic breakdown of their class.

A number of the classroom teachers who were interviewed claimed not to have noticed or thought about the racial or cultural diversity present in their classroom. It was also interesting to note that the small sample of African American teachers seemed to be markedly less reticent in describing the racial makeup of their classroom. The following description, volunteered as a classroom description by an African American teacher even before any specific probes concerning diversity, was more typical of the responses of teachers of color: as the discussion turned more explicitly to issues of race and diversity, some respondents become increasingly stand-offish. The inherent complexity of discussions involving racial equity thus appears to be further intensified by an inability or unwillingness among some

school personnel to even discuss issues involving race. There was a general understanding of educators' responsibilities depicted by documented paperwork, which was appropriate and accurate. The subjectivity could not be strained from the process. This is ameliorated by the cultural mismatch. As children from unfamiliar cultures of the "typical" eurocentricity this places them at a disadvantage when those expectations are placed before them. Not having similar exposure at home, whether due to a cultural and/or an economic shortfall, many students begin at an uneven playing field, frequently unable to catch up with their White counterparts. Educators must make a concerted effort to address these issues, affording these students to achieve to their greatest potential. "In the school, they need more materials for hands on. ... We give these standardized tests, these children have no idea about some of these things because they have no point of reference (acculturation)" (curriculum coach A-3).

From the broad perspective of policy, the overuse of special education for students of color constitutes a serious problem demanding remediation. For teachers facing academic and social problems among the students in their classrooms, however, referral to special education is primarily a method of providing additional resources for any student who is struggling: "If you look at the big picture, overrepresentation of minorities in special ed is a serious problem. But [at the individual teacher level], I truly believe they just want the child to succeed" (classroom teacher B-3). For most of the classroom teacher interviewed, the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education appeared to be a

topic that had not been previously considered, especially prevalent in School Belief. “It is an unspoken but commonly seen situation that has been going on for so long....why state the obvious.” (exceptional teacher B-5). The status quo within the exceptional children's program has been so consistent, it was now a subtle part of the school bias mentality and teachers accepted such results as typical. “I have the most difficulty with the behaviors of minority children. They seem to lack the understanding of how to act in school. They are usually louder and more disruptive” (classroom teacher B-4). “I try to be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of my students but there are times when I feel that I am giving them too much leeway. The White students see that and often copy the same behaviors but are more harshly reprimanded. That causes problems with the class. They feel I am showing favoritism!” (classroom teacher B-3).

The researcher asked teachers to comment on the level of diversity in their classroom and the effects, if any, it had on their teaching. To allow individual perspectives to emerge, I did not define the term diversity initially, but allowed teachers to choose the aspect of diversity they wished to focus on (e.g., diversity of academic needs, socioeconomic diversity, racial diversity). “ We are all diverse....it isn't only culture but we tend to stereotype...it can be gender, physical appearance, relationships with each child's family. It is hard to see all of the children as equals. We see them as individuals that should be treated with equality. Equalism is a bias, in my opinion” (exceptional teacher A-6). “I try to be reactive to the needs of my students. Diversity makes for a greater depth of learning” (exceptional teacher

A-7).

As the interview progressed, I asked more specific questions about the cultural and ethnic makeup of their classroom. Most of the teachers interviewed regarded the diversity of their classroom as a positive. In speaking about diversity, this classroom teacher captured the positive feelings expressed by many of our respondents: “Children need to learn how to act, relate, respond to all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels and behaviors and talents and so on. So I think the more diversity you have, the more opportunities the children have for getting practice in a classroom, kind of a miniworld situation for the big world” (speech pathologist, A-9). “I would often ask parents if they would care to come to the classroom and expose the children to their cultures in some way” (classroom teacher A-3). “Our principal promotes multiculturalism. The staff is very proactive in bringing a world view within the classroom when appropriate to a lesson” (classroom teacher A-5).

Some teachers expressed a strong personal commitment to teaching students about diversity and building an accepting and tolerant community in their classroom. One teacher who had some diversity training had stated, "The research that I found said that over a third of the cowboys out West were African Americans and that is, unfortunately, not something that was presented there in the textbook" (classroom teacher B-2). Although less common, I also heard less tolerant perspectives on racial and ethnic diversity. I was very surprised by the degree of racial stereotyping in some of the responses. “The minority children are not as gung-ho about doing well....frequently homework is not turned in, papers are not returned, on

and on. It's frustrating because many of them won't take the opportunity to do better. I try but it gets very frustrating. They do not seem to care" (classroom teacher B-3). "The minority students feel that I play favorites if one of them gets in trouble. I have overheard a few of them say if they were White they would get away with it. That is not the case. Maybe they hear that at home!" (exceptional teacher B-4).

There is a great deal of misunderstanding and miscommunication. The fact that the racial stereotyping was expressed at School Belief exacerbates the call for a greater degree of staff training at that site. There needs to be a paradigm shift within that school's individual culture, as this dilemma will not resolve on its own.

It is essential that educators use their thirst for knowledge into delving deeper into discovering how other cultures live and communicate. It is a more wholistic and 21st century approach at our shrinking borders and movement of peoples from around the world. It creates a thicker and a richer learning experience from which to better understand all of our students, no matter what their culture may be

Theme 6: So What Accomodations and Resources are Available?

One could not help but be impressed by the level of accommodations that responding teachers described prior to referring a child to special education. The majority of interviewees did not desire to remove students from their classrooms; one teacher even referred to "losing" one of her children to special education this year, as if it were a personal failure that she could not find ways to make that child succeed in her classroom, especially

observed in School Aspire. Unfortunately, when individually probed, there were a few teachers in School Belief that were more receptive to pulling out the ones that were not performing as expected. "Why keep a student in a room that needs so much more to catch up. They usually make it more difficult for the ready to learn child. Then you deal with those behaviors...attention srrking...when they either do not understand or do not want to understand" (classroom teacher B-3).

Many teachers echoed the feelings of one teacher, who stated, "You must tailor your instruction to meet the needs of your kids" (classroom teacher A-4). She described a wide range of interventions that they used prior to considering special education referral, including peer tutoring, instructional accommodations, novel regroupings with other teachers, and cooperative learning. One teacher described them as "all sorts of little interventions that you would not normally do with every single child that you could see that this might help get this child to where he or she needs to be. You know, the little extra effort. And you try all of those, you know, you pull them out of your little bag" (exceptional teacher A-6).

That individualization requires effort, however, and may create additional time and resource burdens for teachers: "There are so many different ways to work with children, and the assessments in the books don't work for it all, so I have to be creative. It takes a lot of work" (classroom teacher B-3).

Although the majority of teachers I interviewed seemed willing and able to accommodate their instruction to fit their students' needs, a number expressed frustration at

the number of skills and roles that are required of them to address the diverse needs of their students. “Now with RTI, more responsibility is placed on us. How much modification should we do and keep the quicker learners interested?” (exceptional teacher B-4). “It is an ongoing struggle, a real juggling act, with so many students and so many needs. The RtI process looks great in theory but it is overwhelming in practice. The whole concept of diverse teacher contradicts the regular education classroom. Those that learn within the “bell curve” should stay while those needing more or less deserve to be given more individualized treatment in a different classroom with fewer students.” (classroom teacher B-3). “I really thing that there is a financial reason to keep children in the regular class. There would be less need for special ed teachers” (exceptional teacher B-5).

There is a need to come up with more finances and resources to better help the students requiring accommodations in order to attain to the best of their ability within the regular classroom setting. A number of possible interventions were identified, including parent support for families, hiring instructional coaches to better understand how to meet the needs of diverse learners, more remedial services, a Web site with a bank of differentiated instructional lessons, and a full-time counselor. The single resource identified most frequently as needed to address the types of problems that the interviewees identified was early intervention. The child coming to school from a deficient or culturally different family dynamic needs a more level playing field in which to catch up. “When a child walks through our door for the first time, we must accept him. No one child comes to us with the same

needs and abilities. It is our job to help him/her become as successful as possible. We must continually assess and evaluate how to better serve each and every student, using whatever resources we have at our disposal. Teacher training and collaboration is one of the greatest of all resources that needs to be embraced” (principal A-1).

Pre-service teacher training lays the groundwork for serving the needs of our children but, it does not stop there. Ongoing training by the school, county, and state is a must.

Resources necessary to carry out those strategies are essential in enabling greater and more successful results within the classroom and school. “Put your money where your mouth is!”

Theme 7: Why Do Schools Have Differing Cultures?

In School Aspire, teachers were highly positive, viewing the prereferral team as an effective peer-driven process to increase classroom resources for addressing student needs: “You know, I really feel that most of the teachers in our building have tried all that they know before they come to the [prereferral team], and then the team adds more to their expertise, and it has been really amazing the knowledge that we can help each other with” (as stated by classroom teacher A-4).

At School Belief, however, the team was viewed as less helpful or even as an obstacle to be cleared prior to placing a student in special education: “I think it is a waste of time for experienced teachers, and better for the newer teachers because they don't have the knowledge or the tools, but for teachers who have been at this for a while, I think it is just delaying the inevitable” (classroom teacher B-3).

As another teacher put it, "They're not going to tell me anything I don't know after all of my experience" (classroom teacher B-2). As a result, I was told by a number of respondents that it was not atypical for teachers who believe that their students truly need to be referred for special education to actively short-circuit the prereferral process by encouraging parents to request assessment prior to the convening of the prereferral team: "Frequently, I'll try to bypass [the prereferral team]. I think if you get a parent to call in for testing, you get it done much quicker . I am honest with them and you if you call the counselor and request testing, it might be done a faster. Then there is no thirty day lag"(classroom teacher B-3).

"The effectiveness of the prereferral process may depend on which attitude participants in the prereferral team are bringing with them. If the teacher's attitude is overly objective and is looking for some more ways to see what I can do about this problem, then it can be real effective. If the teacher is coming in because it's a formal step you have to go through but what you really want is for the child to be tested and put in special education, then it has limited success" (school counselor, A-2).

In the course of these conversations, it became very apparent to me that special education was viewed almost universally in this district as the primary, or perhaps even the sole, resource available for students with particular academic or social needs. Administrators tended to view this as a negative, increasing the probability of inappropriate referrals: "[Teachers] know that something is not working for a child and they feel that they can't tap

into some resources. One stable resource that they have to tap into is special education. It has funding to support it, it's a process that is in place. So it is easy to tap into that subsystem” (special education director, C-1).

Teachers, in contrast, viewed the availability of special education in a highly positive light, almost a lifeline in the face of a general scarcity of resources: “I am pretty open to referring any child that is not finding success. My goal is for every child to be successful” (curriculum coach A-3). “If there's a chance they might qualify, it's always to their benefit to have them checked” (classroom teacher A-7). “We are thinking of sending them on to middle school and they can't read yet. It is frightening so, we must have these kids tested, let's see what we can do. If we can give them a label, at least we can get them help as we let go” (classroom teacher A-4).

School Aspire was very progressive and receptive to new ideas. Their principal was a warm, friendly, intelligent administrator, continually there for all staff, students and parents. She had an open-door policy and the warmth exudes from her office. It was apparent while talking with the staff that the feeling was shared. The students were treated with dignity and respect. School Aspire had been quite successful in the incorporation of teachers and staff coming to the school with differing beliefs and practices and building upon them, molding them to create a positive and learning environment and positive culture, allowing the children to incorporate what they had learned at school into their home and family environments, making them more well rounded and better prepared for success as adults in the 21st century.

School Belief had more of a cliquish impression. There was a great deal of isolation amongst the staff, especially noticeable between grade levels and specialists. The open door policy seen at School Aspire was severely lacking at school Belief. Teachers' doors were closed. The halls were extremely quiet and the classrooms resemble "barracks." Children that were not working with the rest of the class were sitting in isolated areas within the rooms. This was not evident when the staff was aware of my presence. This apparently increases the likelihood of a student being drawn through the Tiers and ending up in an EC classroom. Is it the school culture that incubates this practice of isolationism? Do we hold each teacher accountable for their individual student's needs and hold themselves to the highest of standards? They must do more than talk the talk.

A school's culture is a unique blend of many variables. It is not stagnant and must never be treated as such. It can work for or against the individuals involved, both staff and student(s). Never should one become complacent if there seems to lack an atmosphere of fairness and equality. We are all the gatekeepers and must always be vigilant in maintaining an inspiring and nurturing environment for all of us.

Researcher's Overviews/School Culture Variations

In readdressing the research question: What fosters or inhibits the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special-education classes?

Sub-questions include:

- 1 What is your school's policy (practice) on initially requesting

identifying/testing a particular child? Is there any set of particular “written” policies?

2. What role do teachers, school counselors, and school administrators’ beliefs and practices play in the identification and referral of students for special education services?
3. What role do each of these participants’ beliefs and practices play in how teachers need to diversify lessons in classes for all learners?

School Aspire and School Belief had responded to question 1 in a similar manner.

They both follow protocol as prescribed by Wise County Central Office and North Carolina protocols. The staff at School Aspire was very proactive in assessing and evaluating each student, addressing areas of need through differentiating within the regular classroom setting(s). School Belief, on the other hand, appeared to put the “lower” students in groups within the room, watering down the lesson(s). Such a step keeps the students in those groups as status quo. The discrepancies that I noted were not in the procedural steps but, rather, in a more insidious and possibly subconscious bias seen in School Belief. Teachers in cliques, fewer minorities represented as leaders in the school, greater emphasis on “those scores and benchmarks,” less collaborating on differentiating within the classroom, PLT (professional learning teams) complaining about problems without discussing viable solutions. In answering question 2, there was a great deal of zeal and collaboration at School Aspire. The principal made a point of attending PLT meetings and allowed the staff to conduct those

meetings without her lead. She would only advise upon request. There was a great deal of respect shown amongst the staff. They would discuss dilemmas but work as a team towards resolution, sharing ideas and individual successes. At School Belief, there was minimal administrative direction (as this principal is now gone since research was conducted) and the PLT meetings were griping sessions. Little resolution came as a result. This caused a higher degree of polarization and requests to test the lower achieving students out of regular education. Although the RtI process has many steps where bias could be teased out, it still successfully operates best when educators have truly exhausted all attempts through the tier process. There was a great push to keep the students who would score threes and fours on the end of grade tests, and remove those who might not.

Question 3 examined the individual practices as driven by their beliefs. In School Aspire, the staff were continually training, collaborating, advising each other in a positive way. The special education staff were continually asked for suggestions in how to best differentiate without watering down content. This was evident in the entire school culture. In School Belief, it was viewed as more of a nuisance. By putting students into mini groups within thje class, the stigma was quite apparent. This segregation within the regular classrooms eventually fueled the self-fulfilling prophecy(ies) of sending the less successful students to a special education classroom. The administration did not appear to do much to prevent this.

If success can be judged by the numbers of students receiving RtI, it should be duly

noted that School Aspire is addressing the individual student's needs as the differences in results from both schools indicate.

Table 4.2: RtI Results:

School Aspire

Grade	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	School Aspire
Kindergarten	6 2 Black 1 Hisp. 3 White	3 2 Black 1 White	0	Tiers maintaining
First grade	9 4 Black 2 Hisp 3 White	3 1 Black 1 Hisp 1 White	0	Tiers maintaining
Second grade	8 2 Black 3 Hisp 3 White	4 1 Black 2 Hisp 1 White	0	Tiers maintaining
Third grade	12 4 Black 3 Hisp 5 White	3 1 Black 0 Hisp 2 white	0	Tiers maintaining
Fourth grade	11 6 Black 1 Hisp 4 White	4 1 Black 1 Hiap 2 White	0	Tiers maintaining
Fifth grade	6 2 Black 1 Hisp 3 White	2 2 White	0	Tiers maintaining
Sixth grade	4 1 Black 1 Hisp 2 White	1 1 White	0	Tiers maintaining

School Aspire maintains a constant open communication position. Educators in varying grades communicate with each other. Teachers consistently discuss successful interventions that are not grade or subject specific. The principal and assistant principal are invited to all meetings, whether they be formal or informal. If an administrator is unable to be present, minutes are taken and shared with all important persons as soon as feasible.

Table 4.3: RtI Results (continued):

School Belief

Grade	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	School Belief
Kindergarten	13 6 Black 3 Hisp 4 White	5 3 Black 2 Hisp 0 White	0	Tier 2 maintaining
First grade	22 14 Black 6 Hisp 2 White	7 4 Black 2 Hisp 1 White	0	1 approaching Tier 3
Second grade	17 11 Black 4 Hisp 2 White	8 3 Black 2 Hisp 3 White	0	2 approaching Tier 3
Third grade	19 9 Black 5 Hisp 5 White	6 1 Black 2 Hisp 3 White	0	1 approaching Tier 3
Fourth grade	12 5 Black 4 Hisp 3 White	8 2 Black 3 Hisp 3 White	0	2 approaching Tier 3
Fifth grade	16 7 Black 4 Hisp 5 White	9 1 Black 4 hisp 4 White	0	3 approaching Tier 3
Sixth grade	11 2 Black 4 Hisp 5 White	3 1 Black 2 Hisp 0 White	0	Tier 2 maintaining

There was minimal sharing of information between teachers and administrators. The grade level chairs would discuss findings and assist with interventions within their individual grade level meetings. When asked if they shared data with other grade levels they asked what the reason would be to do so as the difficulty is within that grade and subject. They additionally

stated that administrators were consulted only on a needed basis.

In the next chapter, I analyzed and discussed those findings in the desire to explore how the two schools are similar and different in regards to staff and culture when dealing with the dilemma of individual and school culture interpretations and the impact(s) it may have on minority children that may need additional services within the regular classroom to achieve a greater degree of success in school. I will also discuss the implications of these findings and what future studies might be warranted to further this research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussions and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to determine if I could recognize personal and professional strategies utilized by regular and special education teachers that could be precursors to students' success(s) and or failure(s) in the regular classroom setting.

This chapter highlights the major findings from this study entitled: *A Case Study of Which Beliefs and Practices Foster or Inhibit the Overidentification and Overrepresentation of Minority Students in Elementary Special Education Classes*. The chapter will also illustrate theoretical and practical implications of the study and will construe recommendations for practice and future research on the study of investigating the impact on students as the result of their teachers' opinions.

Review of the Purpose of the Study

As purported in historical and current documentation (see Chapter 2), minority students face social injustices that effectively undercut their potential, self-perception, and prospects to attain success in academic settings. African American students are over-represented in special education, under-represented in gifted education, over-represented among dropouts, and over-represented among students who are unmotivated and choose to disengage academically. African American students make up approximately 8.6 percent of grades K through 12 public school enrollment in the United States; however, they represent roughly 60 percent of all students in special education settings (Kafele, 2010; Schott Foundation, 2010; Smiley, 2011).

After examining the dismal statistics one can see that there is obviously a major problem with the social and educational status of the African American students in our country. Ferguson (2003) reviewed definitions of racial bias and the deficiencies in adequate research, as noted in “Teachers’ Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap.” He examined the controversial but common assumption that teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes” (p. 461). Ferguson’s hypothesis of teacher bias was based on the assertion that educators were conditioned to believe certain characteristics about Blacks and Whites, thereby affecting their perceptions and expectations.

The central research question guiding the study was: What fosters or inhibits the overidentification and overrepresentation of minority students in elementary special education classes?

In addition, the following subquestions were explored:

1. What is your school’s policy (practice) on initially requesting identifying/testing a particular child? Is there any set of particular “written” policy?
2. What role do teachers, school counselors, and school administrators’ beliefs and practices play in the identification and referral of students for special education services?
3. What role does each of these participants play in recommending or assigning students to special education?

Study Findings Through Existing Conceptual and Empirical Analysis

In an attempt to reduce teacher subjectivity and bias of behavior rating scales, Hosp and Hosp (2001) recommended a more comprehensive approach in assessing student behavior. They proposed that schools use various individuals when rating and observing behaviors. They additionally stressed the importance of prior planning for multiple observations at several times in the day, targeting observable behaviors, ensuring that they are measurable, and comparing the child being observed to other children. When a student is assessed by an individual teacher, one's subjectivity has the ability to creep in. With adding additional observers, the subjectivity of one lessens. Unfortunately, a student is usually observed by the same teacher, surrounded by the same students, within the same environment, not allowing the ability to differentiate the impact of certain variables upon the student's academic and/or behavioral performance.

As revealed in Theme 1 (Chapter 4), when a teacher(s) has a bias, whether it be hidden or overt, and is the primary determinant in having a child observed and tested for possible special education placement, it is conceivably a rush to judgment. If a particular student is needing additional assistance and/or resources, the regular education teacher may find it a daunting task to individualize the required classwork, as time and resources are stretched. Whether the child is considered more of a hindrance or needing help beyond the scope of the classroom, needs to be considered by more than the subjective eye of the regular education classroom teacher.

Critical Findings Through Teacher Discourse

Posing the dilemma to the staff at both schools found this researcher determining a stark contrast between the two. The School Aspire staff were typically looking to self improve, for themselves in their profession as well as for greater enabling their students. Quite to the contrary, School Belief staff members cited the system and the expected processes and procedures, The overall sentiment was, "if they want us to do something, they will train us!"

As a retired teacher I have never thought that my self improvement in my profession was the sole responsibility of my employer. There is a critical need for a paradigm shift in that thought process. As the saying goes, "If you do what you did, you'll get what you got."

Best Practice(s) in Assessing Objectively

Farkas (2003) reviewed the minority overrepresentation research in "Racial Disparities and Discrimination in Education." Farkas directed his attention to the Black-White achievement gap and stated, "It has been estimated that at least half, and probably more, of the Black-White gap in 12th-grade academic achievement would be eliminated if we could eliminate the performance gap at school entry" (p. 1119). He proposed four explanations for the racial disparity that included the lack of appropriate instruction, insufficient focus in school and at home, insufficient skills, and lack of instruction during the summer.

Advocating that teachers and administrator must be monitored for signs of prejudice,

Farkas stressed the need to collect and analyze multiple data sets from districts and supplement them with surveys in hopes to understand the root cause of the discrimination. He also called for an increase in experimental studies of school-based interventions that concentrate on the reduction in racial disparities. This researcher did not see any proactive attempts to address this conundrum in School Belief. School Aspire had continual in-services and faculty meetings, employing culturally sensitive materials. The principal was continually monitoring any questionable, racially biased circumstances.

Ferguson (2003) reviewed definitions of racial bias and the deficiencies in adequate research, as noted in “Teachers’ Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap.” He examined the controversial but common assumption that teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes” (p. 461). Ferguson’s hypothesis of teacher bias was based on the assertion that educators were conditioned to believe certain characteristics about Blacks and Whites, thereby affecting their perceptions and expectations. My research had concurred with those findings. I had personally overheard White teachers discussing “those boys” and the continual lack of respect they had for their teachers. “Those boys” were, in fact three African American students in fourth grade at School Belief. They were boisterous in the hall and had developed a reputation. As a result, they were viewed as troublemakers and no longer had an opportunity to be successful. The teachers appeared to have given up on them. As I had overheard one of the teachers state, “They’ ll end up in prison!”

When hearing how teachers give up on students, I refer back to Ferguson (2003) who cited studies that show evidence of teacher accuracy when predicting rank of students' future performance. He attributed this to numerous possibilities: teacher perceptions and expectations may be inflexible, few students may exert effort in changing positions, and teaching style may prohibit children who most need catching up (p. 465).

As noted in Theme 2 (Chapter 4), the exceptional education teacher is not to be considered a "babysitter" for those students that require catching up. The resources that the exceptional teacher offers are just as academically sound as those in the regular education setting. The students are taught with modifications, diversifying their requirements step by step. There have been many instances where this researcher, as an exceptional education teacher, was requested to take a child because "they are just not getting it and holding the class back" (classroom teacher B-3).

Ferguson (2003) was critical of systemic underestimation of students' potential: "It is a major waste of human potential and a social injustice that we do not give teachers the incentives and supports they need to set, believe in, and skillfully pursue higher goals for all students, but especially for African Americans and other stigmatized minorities" (p. 468).

He asserted that responsive teaching was highly effective. As teacher expectations increased in the classroom, there were fewer behavior problems and absenteeism and increased achievement and family involvement. If teachers are able to "not give up" on any student, the success of that individual child is possible.

Bias Stemming from Preexisting Beliefs

Harry and Klingner (2006) and Harry, Klingner, and Hart (2005) found negative beliefs about African-American families to be pervasive among educators. Families of African-American students were described as neglectful, incompetent, and dysfunctional, despite the absence of any firsthand knowledge of those families' actual circumstances. Such descriptions also ignore significant cultural strengths in African-American communities, such as the involvement and expertise of extra familial adults who may act as protectors despite economic disadvantage (Harry & Klingner, 2006; King, 2005). As a result, teachers from all walks of life must be trained in cultural sensitivity.

One of the most consistent findings in educational research is that students achieve in direct proportion to their opportunity to learn (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). This, again, placed the teacher at the controls within the classroom learning environment. If there are any underlying preconceived biases regarding minority students, this could impede their learning. It might well be expected that students whose educational opportunities were limited will be more likely to be referred for special-education services (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry, 1994).

Access to Resources/ Level the Playing Field/ Cultural Bias

Differential access to educational resources has been consistently demonstrated for some minority groups in a number of areas (Kozol, 2005; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Of the possible links between general-education practices and special-education disproportionality, however, only the proportion of culturally sentient teachers in the teaching force had been

directly investigated.

Lander and Hammons (2001) discovered that the discrepancy of African-American and White rates of eligibility for special education rose in direct proportion to the percentage of the teaching force that was White, especially in districts with a White percentage of more than 60%. Generally, inequity in the quality and quantity of educational resources had been extensively documented. Curricula and instructional presentation appeared to perform a disservice for working-class students or students of color (Ferri & Connor, 2005, Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Serious deficiencies in physical facilities and resources in urban schools have been documented (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Oakes, Ormseth, Bell, & Camp, 1990). Such resource disparities may have their origin in inequitable school funding formulas (Rebeli, 1999) or in historical patterns of segregation and re-segregation (Katznelson, 2005; Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

As noted in Theme 3 (Chapter 2), questioning the availability and variety of resources have an enormous impact on offering the regular education teacher a greater field of opportunities from which to glean a more diversified course of instruction for children needing additional instruction. If those added resources are not available to the teacher, there is a greater degree of mounting frustration for both teacher and student.

Differences Discovered Between Two Schools

School Aspire has an African American principal and a White assistant principal. There is a staff of 41 teachers of which 21 are African American and 20 are White. There are

4 African-American teacher's assistants. I had asked the principal if this has always been the case. She did state that she was concerned that it would be in the best interest of the school to consciously hire well suited minority teachers to maintain a better balance, both for the students and the staff. As she put it, "The best way for teachers to learn about people from other cultures is having them work side by side on a daily basis. Many prejudices disappear as they get to know each other as individuals. Many friendships have formed as a result."

School Belief has two White administrators. There is a staff of 37 teachers and 5 teacher assistants. There are 27 White teachers, 4 African American teachers, 1 White teacher's assistant, and 4 African American teacher's assistants. The great disparity in the racial makeup at that school is overwhelming. When I had asked the teachers if they ever have workshops and/or faculty meetings devoted to racial sensitivity they unanimously stated "no"! One could assume that such a lack of attention to that subject could perpetrate the persistence of cultural stereotyping.

Teasing Out Subjectivity

As special education evaluations are often presented to parents as a set of discrete decisions based on scientific analysis and assessment, but even test-driven decisions are inescapably subjective. Harry (1994), for example, described how subjective decisions creep into all elements of the evaluation process, including whom to test, what test to use, when to use alternative tests, how to interpret student responses, and what weight to give results from specific tests. All of these alter the outcomes. With minimal exposure to self reflection and

understanding cultural differences, School Belief has practiced such isolation with their staff and students. The literature on the subject has affirmed those results.

The overarching question is whether these results are true representations of the students' abilities or of the teachers' judgment in placement. According to Goodlad (1990), the literature indicates that some teacher candidates presuppose that not all children are capable of learning. Teacher candidates, as well as experienced teachers (Guskey, 1988; Pajares, 1992), have been found to contemplate beliefs that are challenging to transform through exposure to new ideas alone (Deering & Stanutz, 1995; Kagan, 1992). Is there a faction of professionals who truly appreciate the delicacy and subtlety of cultural dissimilarities that set in motion an approach to learning that begins years prior to walking into a classroom? Is this true of students as well as teachers? In my research, it was prevalent in both schools. School Aspire had a great deal of objectivity, as they had a proportionately mixed staff that was exposed to continual staff development in culture.

Researchers (Ladson-Billings, 1992; McKenzie, 2002; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) have shown that without proper reflection, application, and contextualization, internalization of values and knowledge regarding cultural diversity is unlikely to arise for teacher candidates. A common practice among prospective teachers is to interpret social difference and inequality through a skewed perspective in which success is directly related to individual achievement and talent, irrespective of environmental or broader social factors such as racial discrimination, poverty, unequal treatment in public institutions, language barriers, and other

patterns of oppression. If these practices are not caught at the college level, the on site administrators, as well as the hiring county must make a point of training their staff to be aware of racial sensitivities and develop an objective understanding of those from different cultures. The effects of this orientation is the justification of patterned, negative judgments and actions against children and their capabilities (King, 1991; McDiarmid & Price, 1990). For some researchers, these circumstances warrant the judgment that most teacher candidates are “culturally insular” (Zimpher & Harvey, 1992, p. 90). Talk of cultural diversity is typically confined to “safe” areas that demand little reflective inquiry. Many staff members veer away from the discussion. The White teachers were reticent to discuss culture. They felt uncomfortable. The African American staff had the opposite reaction.

Uncertainty is avoided, as are questions about consequences of pedagogical decisions and the ethical dimensions of education (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). Even when some progress is made toward changing teacher candidates' beliefs about children, social difference, and inequity, teachers may revert to traditional ways and established beliefs (McDiarmid & Price, 1990) or utilize them in such a way as to strengthen their original positions prior to a field experience (Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). This may be the case even when apparent advances in teacher candidates' politically consultative views were demonstrated in their work for related courses in sociology (Mardle & Walker, 1980). The researchers discussed above reported problems that require serious attention in the course of preservice teacher education. I would argue, however, that to impose culpability

only on the student teachers, however convenient and logical, is hindering a remedy insofar as there is a lack of investigation into alternative explanations for inadequate learning. Such analyses do not contextualize teachers' learning and understanding by taking into account the boundary of political realities and awareness of everyday practices. This practice must be ongoing throughout every school in every district, as each location has its own set of variables and cultures.

McIntosh (1988, 1990) reflected, as a White teacher, what she had been taught about racism beyond something that places others at a disadvantage. She had been trained not to see the consequences of White privilege, which put her at an advantage at the expense of others. Thinking Whites were carefully taught not to recognize White privilege, she had begun in an uninformed way to ask what it is like to have White privilege and came to see it as an invisible package of unearned assets, which one can count on cashing in each day, but which was "meant" to remain oblivious. Describing White privilege makes one newly accountable. She discovered a pattern running through the "matrix of White privilege," a pattern of assumptions, passed on through generations of White culture. The one key piece of that phenomenon was the cultural domination. Being of the main culture, she could also criticize it fairly freely without reprisal.

Just as her racial group was assertive, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made to feel unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected her from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which was being subtly trained to

descending turn upon people of color. In her class and place, she did not see herself as a racist, as she acknowledged racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in the invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on her group from birth. The White teachers at School Aspire were more aware of the White mentality, which was not discussed at School Belief. I venture to state that it is more than coincidence. It is training and exposure to cultures other than White European ethos that affords a greater degree of objectivity and understanding. hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Irvine (2007) stated that “culturally relevant pedagogy” describes effective teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. It can be daunting to understand and implement. Yet even when people do not know the term, they tend to appreciate culturally relevant pedagogy when they see it. Often, these well-meaning educators assume that culturally relevant pedagogy means merely acknowledging ethnic holidays, including popular culture in the curriculum, or adopting colloquial speech.

A culturally relevant pedagogy builds on the premise that learning may differ across cultures and that teachers can enhance students’ success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice.

Culturally relevant pedagogy has theoretical roots in the notion that learning is a socially mediated process and related to students’ cultural experiences. Culture is an important survival strategy that is passed down from one generation to another through the

processes of enculturalization and socialization, a type of roadmap that guides and shapes behavior. If new information is not relevant to those frameworks of culture and cognition, people will never remember it. If the information is relevant, they will never forget it.

As noted in Chapter 4 (Theme 4), there are misperceptions of minority disproportionality and diversity. Teaching cultural relevant pedagogy in isolation breeds a greater degree of bias. If a particular group of students are “highlighted” (whether it be race or gender related) there is a polarization and isolation from the rest of the group. If the educator embraces the differences as part of the collage of world cultures and integrates that into the overall pedagogy, it is assimilation, not isolation. Showing similarities of how cultures share the same values and mores in different ways, affords the student a greater understanding of how we are all similar, with different ways of celebrating the same theme.

Best Practices/ Prevailing Over Cultural Mismatch

The cultural norms and behaviors of schools are based on a very specific set of mainstream assumptions. When there is a cultural mismatch or cultural incompatibility between students and their school, certain negative outcomes might occur, such as miscommunication; confrontations among the student, the teacher, and the home; hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem; and possibly school failure. Teachers need to find pertinent examples in students’ experience; they need to compare and contrast new concepts with concepts students already know; they need to bridge the gap between the known (students’ personal cultural knowledge) and the unknown (materials and concepts to be

mastered).

Culturally relevant teaching isn't about lowering those "high expectations." It's about providing strong supports by approaching effective instruction through a cultural lens. I believe that many diverse students fail in schools not because their teachers don't know their content but because their teachers haven't made the connections between the content and their students' existing mental schemes, prior knowledge, and cultural perspectives. In helping learners make sense of new concepts and ideas, culturally relevant teachers create learning opportunities in which students' voices emerge and knowledge and meaning are constructed from the students' perspectives.

Thinking of culturally relevant teachers as action researchers extends another important component of the reflection process. Action research is inquiry conducted *by* teachers *for* teachers for the purpose of higher student achievement. Action research requires teachers to identify an area of concern, develop a plan for improvement, implement the plan, observe its effects, and reflect on the procedures and consequences.

Finally, student achievement is not the only purpose of a culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant teachers must also assist students to change the society, not simply to exist or survive in it. For some teachers, this can be very challenging. When teachers promote justice, they directly confront inequities in society . Far too many teachers appear to be unable or unwilling to see, hear, or speak about instances of individual or institutional racism in their personal and professional lives. My findings concur that the more the teachers self

reflect, the greater degree of objectivity exists. The teachers at School Belief avoided specific questions regarding race. Teacher B-3 stated, “It is uncomfortable for me to discuss race. I grew up in a White Christian home and had not been exposed to Black children. I am always afraid I could say the wrong thing. I try to overcompensate by easing up on them in class. I am harder on the White children.” That is obviously the most detrimental approach as the students see that immediately. The teacher loses credibility with her class. It becomes a form of reverse discrimination at that point.

Teachers must consciously create social interactions to help themselves meet the three previously mentioned criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Much has been written about classroom social interactions (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rist, 1970; Wilcox, 1982). The vigor of some of the research in this area is evidenced by its impact on classroom practices. For example, teachers throughout the nation have either heard of or implemented various forms of cooperative learning (Cohen & Benton, 1988; Slavin, 1987): cross-aged, multi-aged, and heterogeneous ability groupings.

Teachers must sustain adaptable student-teacher relationships, demonstrating a connectedness with all of the students, developing a community of learners, and encouraging students to learn collaboratively, thus becoming responsible for another. In those classrooms, the teacher-student relationships must be open-minded. The culturally relevant teachers must encourage a community of learners rather than competitive, individual achievement. By demanding a higher level of academic success for the entire class, individual success would

not suffer. Rather than lift up individuals (contributing to feelings of peer alienation), the teacher would have the students believe they were one component of a class of intelligent children.

To firm up the social relationships in their classes, the teachers must persuade the students to learn collaboratively by teaching each other and to become responsible for the academic success of others. Those collaborative arrangements are not necessarily structured like those of cooperative learning, as they can be a combination of formal and informal peer collaborations. Such relationships were evident in School Aspire. The observations in School Aspire had children from varied ethnicities sitting together in the classroom. There appeared to be a separation by race when observing in School Belief. I had asked the two teachers that I observed why that was and surprisingly, neither of them realized it until I pointed it out to them. Incredibly, I posed the question asking who created the seating charts. They both stated that they did. That was eye opening as neither teacher thought that they were biased.

As seen in Chapter 4 (Theme 5), the difficulty regarding speaking about race is a constant stumbling block. As School Aspire continually assesses and reassesses its strategies, as displayed by the openness and collegial atmosphere, School Belief functions in a contrary manner. The teachers were closed mouthed regarding race. There was a distinct disdain when this researcher brought up the subject. It is an offshoot of the “I am part of the machine” mentality.

Possessing cultural awareness and utilizing cultural literature are critical skills and

behaviors for a teacher to have because without them, a “lack of understanding is created, that frequently leads teachers to employ disciplinary responses that would not be necessary if they understood the meaning of the students’ behavior” Irvine (1990).

Harry and Anderson (1994) and Villegas (1991) considered an effective teacher to be “defined by the ability to create meaningful classroom activities that take into account students’ background experiences” (p. 18).

In an attempt to rectify inadequacies, students should be required to complete inventories (i.e., teachers should deliberately gather information about their students’ personal, cultural, familial, and neighborhood backgrounds), teachers should adopt a proactive stance toward discipline (i.e., providing students with explicit standards of acceptable behavior), everyone should be held equally accountable, and finally, teachers should incorporate physical movement (i.e., integrating kinesthetic movement into lesson plans, increasing teachers’ tolerance of noise levels, reducing “teacher talk,” and incorporating multisensory experiences) in the classroom (Monroe, 2006).

Sustaining Appropriate Resources

Additionally, when addressing the overrepresentation of minority students in special-education services, school systems need to provide schools with adequate and effective resources. Although school resources appear in a variety of forms, the most important resource relevant to this study is that of qualified teachers who possess a high degree of teacher efficacy. Again, based upon previously presented research, the neediest students often

receive the least experienced and least prepared teachers (Stover, 1999). This practice of “handicapping” students must immediately cease, as it further debilitates students’ learning, leaving them academically ill-prepared and ill-equipped. Schools and school districts need to adamantly and vigorously invest in providing meaningful and useful professional-development opportunities for inexperienced teachers. Mentorship programs should also be implemented to strengthen the skills of inexperienced teachers and broaden their knowledge base.

In Chapter 4 (Theme 6), teachers are limited if the resources needed are not there. Such frustration is exhaustive for that teacher if they must diversify within the regular curriculum. There may be a need for more manipulatives, computers, calculator, etc. and if they are lacking, the regular education classroom teacher may automatically feel that the special education classroom is better equipped to fulfill the needs of a particular student. Such a process only fuels the overrepresentation of students in special education. If their individualized needs were met in the regular classroom, with the assistance of more resources for the teacher, that could be a decisive step in minimizing the problem.

With a concerted and conscientious effort in the aforementioned areas, both teachers and school districts will begin to address the issue of overrepresentation of minorities in special-education programs and would have a better understanding of cultural mismatch within the schools, minimizing the insidious perpetration that the White way is the right way.

School Aspire had been the more proactive of the two as the regular education and

special education teachers continually share resources, as observed on site.

The Stereotyping Conundrum

Chang and Demyan (2007), though they discovered fairly balanced positive and negative stereotypes held by teachers across White and Black students, suggested that stereotypes could add to achievement discrepancies if they changed the way those stereotyped individuals were treated by others or how individuals perceived themselves. They suggested that school psychologists consider stereotypical beliefs and how these may be influencing teachers' referral practices. Though factors related to teacher bias were certainly not the only area of concern, researchers had pointed out that if school personnel were harboring biases or had never explored their own assumptions about race and stereotypes, it was not likely that those same personnel would see the need for or support extensive change efforts in the area of disproportionality (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, et al., 2006).

Therefore, the factors contributing to and involved in disproportionality are complex. Researchers and American educators need to identify not only individual, but systemic factors that contribute to educational inequities (Skiba et al., 2005) as well as further document how White privilege and racism are a part of creating and maintaining disproportionality (Blanchett, 2006). This problem must be examined in a larger social context (Blanchett, 2006). This problem should not be viewed from a binary perspective, as a result of either individual or structural factors, but rather as the intersection of multiple

factors.

The conceptual framework model shows all students enrolled as a model of intrastudent and teachers within the classroom setting. I had created this model based on the perspective from which to view the contributions of local educational processes to racial and economic disparity entitled cultural reproduction theory (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Originally used as an explanation of the continuation of class-based differences, the theory has been advanced to highlight racial and class inequities reproduced over time through institutional and individual actions, and decisions that maintain the status quo at the expense of less privileged groups (Mehan, 1992; Oakes, 1982; Skiba, Bush, & Knesting, 2002). One important implication of cultural reproduction is that those actions or processes may be motivated by individual or institutional habit patterns of which those who participate in those institutional actions are unaware. If left unchecked, such patterns can unintentionally recreate and reinforce existing inequities in school processes. Each decision-maker brings his or her individual differences, ideologies, and experiences into the institutional arena, the site where the ultimate decision is made. As varied resources come into play, they must be reflected upon under a greater deal of scrutiny. Mehan, Hertwick, and Miehl's (1986) ethnographic study of the referral-to-placement process exemplified the socially constructed nature of disability decision-making. As each step in the process led to a student's placement in a special-education program, both individual teacher judgments and institutional constraints blatantly contributed to the eventual decision to label a student as disabled.

Almost one-third of those students who were not declared disabled, for example, failed to be served simply because there was a breakdown in the process and the assessment was terminated. Harry, Klingner, Sturges, and Moore (2002) described similar sources of variability in an ethnographic study focusing primarily on the contributions of school psychologists to special-education assessment and decision-making. Harry et al. noted that although psychological testing is often perceived as an objective procedure less likely to be influenced by individual judgments, the process is in fact often highly idiosyncratic because psychologists choose tests or test batteries that are more likely to produce the results that they, or the teachers making the referral, desire. From concept to application, the process follows the progression as shown by Figure 2.1.

From a Conceptual Framework to Study Findings

Within both School Aspire and School Belief, pre-referral or general education intervention teams assisted as an increasing resource(s) or support for teachers who were working with students with academic or behavioral challenges. But the effectiveness of those teams appeared to vary greatly from school to school as well as from teacher to teacher (dependent upon their possible preexisting biases). Special education was broadly considered as the only resource obtainable for helping students who were not succeeding. As a result, many teachers got it wrong and went in the direction of over-referral if it meant they could gain access to more resources for their neediest students.

In my research, there was a reserve when discussing issues of race among many of

the participants. Such difficulties in interaction may hinder actual problem solving efforts. In concert those results created a surprisingly multifaceted picture of the factors that may cause and maintain minority disproportionality in schools. Three particular conclusions stood out from those conversations:

1. The factors that create and maintain racial disparities in special education, referral and placement are highly complex and interactive. It is critical, therefore, to avoid one-dimensional solutions in addressing those issues.
2. Reducing minority student referrals to special education without reducing students' access to needed educational resources would require substantial increases in the resources available in general education to meet the needs of disadvantaged students.
3. The difficulty in confronting the unavoidable facts of racial disparity in education may itself add to the continued inability to effectively deal with these problems.

Although there was a greater degree of success within the culture at School Aspire, these overarching conclusions propose that, in order to create a more meaningful change in practices that could reduce disparities, school personnel must be willing to challenge those disparities that exist, identify practices that may contribute to disparity, and begin to develop strategies to address those issues.

As seen in Chapter 4 (Theme7), it is understandable that each school has a different culture. Its racial and socioeconomic makeup are not the same. The staff and administrators

function in a unique dynamic. Yet, with the differences, the overall atmosphere is to celebrate, not isolate, uniqueness. School Aspire made a concerted effort to continually practice that process, whereas School Belief polarized their culture in a more White Euro-ethnic manner. They remained status quo, never wanting to change/improve the way(s) they functioned. It is to their detriment that they have such a stagnating philosophy that had been festering there for many years. If there was a glimmer of light, they had a new administrator coming on board for the next school year. Hopefully, that person would be a game changer.

As standardized testing is a necessary “evil,” it is paramount for teachers, regardless of their school culture(s), to build up their childrens' self esteem and teach them to the best of their ability, in any and all settings.

In addition, unless accountability testing is paired with high-quality instruction, it may be associated with a number of negative outcomes for disadvantaged learners, including disparate failure rates (Madaus & Clark, 2001; Natriello & Pallas, 2001), and the shift in local resources away from teaching and toward testing, especially in districts with high poor and minority enrollments (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

As home environment(s) play such a pivotal role, it is essential that teachers become sentient of that language disconnect for some students and teach them how to transition from casual register to formal register and why they should learn to do so. If students can connect the benefits of learning formal register in their daily lives, they would comprehend the significance of connecting the academic environment with their home life. My observation of

these teachers was that many have realized this importance, through what they referred to as increasing vocabulary, expressive language, and communication skills, and that this realization is important to their students' school and personal success. It could also be a reason for why their students are successful on standardized tests such as the NC EOG math and reading tests.

Implications for Practice

My study could help to inform teachers of the better practice in their responsibility for initiating a greater degree of academic success for students from a culture/home life devoid of any measurable amount of enrichment, may essentially rest in the hands of the classroom teacher. It is vital that classroom teachers create a level playing field within their classroom(s). There must be an opportunity for all students to achieve to their greatest potential. This can only occur if the teacher uses an unbiased lens, barring all preconceptions regarding students from cultures other than their own. Not only do individual students have unique needs within the classroom, they come to school from a varied collage of cultures, many with their own biases and apprehensions towards teachers of White European backgrounds, which are in the majority at present.

Teachers must create an inclusive environment. They must make sure that classroom posters, pictures, books, music, and other materials are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, family situations, disabilities, etc. Varied representations are not only vital for making diverse student populations feel included, but are paramount for teaching

homogeneous student populations about the world beyond their classroom. The teachers must avoid having only limited examples of a particular group, and vary the roles depicted for each group. This should be present in the school library, corridors, and other public spaces are also diverse and inclusive, either by buying new materials that show people from a variety of backgrounds and situations, or by adding people to existing materials. If biased materials remain visible, they need to be used as opportunities to teach children to think about issues of bias. Additionally, language usage is to be unbiased, inclusive, and does not divide students unnecessarily whether in the racial or gender category.

Children's questions and concerns must be addressed. There was a noticeable difference with interactions between teacher and student at School Aspire. If questions were to be asked, the teachers had a board where sticky notes could be placed. There was also an allotted time between subjects for questions and answers. There was a noticeable air of patience for the students in that school. There was a sincere respect for the students' needs, and was infused throughout that school's culture. The same cannot be said for School Belief. If a student raised a hand in class, I could see that not all questions were addressed. There were even instances where the teacher told the student to put his hand down. When students ask a question related to prejudice or group differences, it is best if teachers answer directly rather than avoiding the question or changing the topic. Otherwise, children may infer that they should not ask about these issues, and that there is something shameful to avoid. Instead, reinforce children's natural curiosity, and explain the distinction between noticing social

differences and being prejudiced. If children mention social differences that should raise a discussion about their observations and answer any questions they have. If a student's question makes a teacher uncomfortable, it is best to answer it on the spot, but then they should take time later to reflect on what made them uncomfortable.

Instruction

Site administrators must make certain that they educate their staff about bias so that they can recognize it and its effects in their classrooms. They should self-examine for any biases or prejudices that they may have, and either eliminate them or keep them out of the classroom. There may be site specific biases as each school has its individualized culture, within any given county.

Each teacher must establish ground rules for the classroom. By asking students to help establish the rules or guidelines for appropriate classroom interaction it would create an environment that encourages students to work together to build a prejudice-free classroom where they can share ideas openly.

Teachers must integrate diversity into every topic. It is essential that they set aside time during every unit to examine the topic from different viewpoints. They need to encourage students to identify different points of view, the people who may be affected by the topic, how they are affected, and what their responses or feelings may be. That is a remarkable way to teach students how to develop empathy. Using team-building exercises helps to foster positive relationships among students.

The teacher must demonstrate tolerance. Serving as a model of tolerant and non-defensive behavior establishes the idea that making mistakes or being different is part of the process of learning and living. Teachers should never be fearful to share personal experiences with children about times when they or someone they know has been on the receiving end of prejudice or discrimination.

Teachers must continually review classroom materials to be certain they are inclusive as well as making sure classroom displays, bulletin boards and learning materials are accurately representative of all people. They must avoid displays or materials that might reinforce stereotypes.

It is vital that they develop an "emergency lesson." By anticipating a possible prejudicial behavior in the classroom they must be proactive by preparing the emergency lesson to address the prejudice or discrimination displayed. Teachers who do not firmly and immediately address discriminatory behavior may cause students to think they condone it.

The crucially sensitive elements were continuously seen in School Aspire. The classrooms and hallways were decorated in bias free student work (no hint of gender or race on any of the student work). The media center had displays of Amelia Earhardt and Charles Lindbergh, Barack Obama and George Washington, Sally Ride and Neil Armstrong. Such exhibits substantiate to the children that neither race nor gender holds one back from success in many fields of endeavor. It was quite inspirational to see. Such displays were lacking in School Belief. It was almost to the degree of a self fulfilling prophecy.

What has been done in the past cannot be undone but we must learn from our mistakes. Teachers should take the opportunity to view each and every child with their individual potential(s) and work from that point forward. If guidance with difficulties arise, peers at the school and/or county level should assist, helping ensure the child gets the most quality education from more than one teacher's perspective.

School Aspire has an open door policy. The principal makes herself available, as well as, accessing whatever resources are needed, to help her staff and students. This open door policy was not evident in School Belief. There was a timidity that this researcher noted while doing interviews and observations. When I had asked teachers at School Belief if they ask for assistance they generally stated that they figure it out themselves or go online for help. There was an overt timidity to collaborate with peers within that school, and its culture. It is detrimental to the overall growth of the school and the staff and students as a whole. They are not taking advantage of the vast diversity of raw material(s). If teachers could use those resources, they could take advantage of a more fitting, better suited and individualized course of action by which to better address the needs of their students. In order to address a more appropriate practice, teachers must teach in a way that meets the needs of all of their students. As it may require more attention, time, and effort, it appears to be a daunting task.

According to Wong et al. (2007), "teacher quality must be defined beyond the parameters of content knowledge to include teacher's ability to create optimal learning environments for students marginalized by the system because of their primary language,

race/ethnicity, social class, culture, gender, and ability” (p. 10). Teachers should not be considered qualified merely because they know the subject they are teaching but should be considered qualified because of how they are teaching. They need to reflect, asking themselves one question. Are their students being given valuable, effective opportunities to learn in the best way possible? One area that many pre-service teachers are ending up not as qualified in is the area of multicultural education. One major reason for this could be the result of the pre-service teachers preexisting biases. According to Atwater et al. (2010), “most teacher educators indicate that students resist multicultural education” (p. 292). Why is this so? As individuals, we hold our own beliefs about a variety of issues. The area of multicultural education is no different. Graff (2010), said, “Individuals who are unaware of the complexities and socio-political agencies surrounding immigration may unjustly harbor resentment and exhibit prejudicial attitudes and behavior toward immigrants” (p. 107).

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Initially, a teacher must self reflect as objectively as possible. She must analyze how the opinions, beliefs, and perspectives that she holds affect the curriculum she is planning to teach. Whether intentional or not, a teacher's thoughts, perceptions, biases, and feelings can definitely be portrayed to her students.

There is another reason that many teachers may be exiting college not well qualified in the area of multicultural education. Quite possibly, it could be the result of the teacher education they have received. According to Parrish and VanBershot (2010), "the growing multicultural nature of education and training environments makes it critical that instructors...develop skills to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adaptive instruction" (p.1). So how can this be remedied?

Dunn et al. (2009) suggested "it is important for teacher education programs to continue to explore innovative ways to infuse intercultural inquiry into teacher preparation to broaden student teachers' experiences with diversity" (p. 552). They maintain a recommendation by suggesting "faculties of education aim to ensure that all teacher candidates take part in field experiences that involve working in communities with diverse populations" (p. 553).

There is an impasse when, if faculties of education are not educating those teacher candidates to be qualified to teach in multicultural classrooms, where are the candidates supposed to develop these skills?

Educators need to teach in a way that will meet the needs of all of their students. It may be challenging to do so. It may require more attention, time, and effort. But if the teachers desire to be considered well qualified, it is a necessity.

According to Wong et al. (2007), teacher quality must be defined beyond the parameters of content knowledge to include teacher's ability to create optimal learning environments for students marginalized by the system because of their primary language, race/ethnicity, social class, culture, gender, and ability" (p. 10). Teachers should not be considered qualified simply because they know the content they are teaching. Rather, teachers should be considered qualified because of how they are teaching. They must ask themselves one big question. Are their students being given valuable, effective opportunities to learn in the best way possible?

So one of the first things that a teacher must do is to examine herself. She needs to see how the opinions, beliefs, and perspectives that she holds affect the curriculum she is planning to teach. Whether intentional or not, a teacher's thoughts, perceptions, biases, and feelings can definitely be portrayed to her students.

Involvement of Others

The continued involvement of other supportive teachers, administrators, staff members is paramount so that everyone is modeling a concern for best practice within the entire school setting. Parent involvement, continually keeping them informed, is vital when communicating with them what types of questions their children are asking and what answers you are giving. This reduces the possibilities of children receiving mixed messages from school and home. School Aspire had continuous dialogue with the parents and guardians of the students. Each student had a daily communication log that was filled out by the teacher and signed by a parent/guardian. It was fairly well maintained. This was not evident in

School Belief. They did have daily logs but it appeared that at some point they stopped sending them home.

Integrate Children's Own Experiences

Teachers should use whatever diversity exists among their students to model inclusiveness (i.e. if students are about to do an activity that is difficult for a disabled student to do, invite students to help adapt the activity so that everyone can participate). Under the proper circumstances, such an approach can establish a norm of inclusiveness and reward students for valuing each other's participation.

One should never single out minority students or call on them unsolicited to represent their group. When discussing families, cultures, lifestyles, and social groups, vary the focus and the order of presentation to avoid implicitly conveying an order of importance (e.g., use "she or he" as well as "he or she").

Avoiding a "tourist approach" to multiculturalism that limits diversity to holidays, special events, and history months and integrate various cultures and backgrounds into the everyday life of the classroom would encourage students to increase discussions with their own ethnic traditions and experiences.

If gender or racial segregation is noticed during play times, reorganize the activities or play area to encourage integration and diminish stereotypes. For example, if girls gravitate toward playing house and dressing up, relocate woodworking tools near the house for home repairs.

The teacher must instantaneously deal with discriminatory behavior. Avoiding the problem will not make it go away, and maintaining silence may even give the appearance of tacit approval. Instead, one must make it clear that it will never be tolerated (racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or other offensive jokes, slurs, or behaviors) and explain why. If one cannot respond at the time the incident takes place, respond as soon after as possible before the problem worsens.

Deep-seated problems and conflicts do not disappear immediately. Unlearning prejudice and developing social awareness is a lifelong process, and it is unrealistic to expect instant results with young children. Nonetheless, if cases of bias are used as vehicles for education, it is quite possible to reduce students' prejudice over time.

Never debase prejudiced students who make mistakes or behave badly. Humiliating students is not only unkind, it often deepens their feelings of resentment and rivalry without addressing the underlying causes of prejudice. The best approach is a compassionate effort to understand what went wrong and what might be done to avoid similar episodes in the future.

Make empathy training as central to one's lesson plans as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Empathy can be taught effectively with role-playing and role-reversal exercises, and research suggests that greater empathy is significantly associated with reductions in prejudice, aggression, and interpersonal conflict.

Be a role model who walks the talk and takes a stand for social justice. Reflect and practice inclusive multicultural values in all aspects of one's life, not just while class is in

session. Demonstrate that you respect and value the knowledge, talents, and diversity of all people. Discover more about prejudice and social justice, not only the forms of bias that affect you most directly, but the forms that affect other groups as well.

In an attempt to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of other cultures, School Aspire hold cultural fairs throughout the year. They invite parents and community leaders in to talk to the students and staff, as well as have cooking and craft demonstrations. School Belief does have two annual events, one during Black History Month and one for Cinco de Mayo. Unfortunately, so much time goes by that much of what is experienced is forgotten. Within Wise County, the arts take students straight to the heart of education. History comes alive when students dig their thumbs into wet clay to create a water jug just like the ones early Native Americans used to carry water from the stream. Science makes sense when students understand how heat turns that soft clay and liquid glaze into a jug that can actually carry water and is more than just an attractive piece of pottery. Music teaches students the math of intervals, half notes, and time, as well as communication within and between cultures. Performing a poem builds confidence as well as learning how to express oneself using language as a tool and its translation from one language/culture to another. When the arts are integrated into education, students become more excited about learning (and perform better in school!), teachers and administrators become more engaged, and families become closer. Artists become part of the community, working with students and teachers to become part of school and lives forever. These are opportunities that are available

to all schools within Wise County.

Implications for Policy

When thinking about alternative discipline strategies and policy implementation, it is important to look closely at the causes of such disproportionate treatment and ensure that the school district uses proactive strategies with any alternative approach that address the issue head on.

When asking what are some of the causes of disproportionate treatment in discipline and how can they be proactively addressed, a multitude of overlapping factors can be the cause which include:

- Cognitive psychology shows that, even in the absence of an outright intent to discriminate, people act according to unconscious biases that make them behave discriminatorily against races that have been historically segregated. (Epstein,1994)
- Social class, generational, and experiential differences increase the divide and subsequent misunderstanding between African American students and their teachers and administrators, even with similar ethnic backgrounds.
- Cultural conflicts exist between many African American students' culture and the dominant culture of the schools they attend. (For instance, many African American students are accustomed to engaging in multiple, varied tasks simultaneously when outside of school. If a school's instructional activities are structured around working silently and on one activity at a time, some African American students may be

- perceived to be willfully defiant for talking or working collaboratively).
- Some African American students engage in “stage-setting” behaviors to prepare for starting an assignment, such as sharpening pencils, talking to classmates, and going to the restroom. Teachers may mistakenly view this as not beginning an assignment immediately but as avoidance of schoolwork and noncompliance.
 - Verbal and nonverbal communication differences can generate further cultural conflict and misinterpretation between school staff and African American students. Many teachers may misinterpret the more active and physical style of communication of African American students to be combative or argumentative. Teachers who tend to accept stereotypes of adolescent African American students as threatening or dangerous may overreact to relatively minor threats to authority.

Schools must begin to address the disparate treatment imposed on students of color by adopting culturally conscious classroom management practices and revising their discipline policies to remove subjective offenses from the possibilities of options. They must examine suspension and expulsion data and systemically address disproportionate discipline results. This ensures that differential discipline is not applied to any group of students based on ethnicity, gender, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or any intersection of those identities.

- Educate all school staff about disproportionality and methods for combating it,
- Adopt an alternative discipline policy, making sure to be mindful of and proactively

seeking to combat implicit and explicit racial bias,

- Increase the awareness of teachers and administrators of the potential for bias when issuing referrals for discipline,
- Utilize a range of consequences in response to behavior problems,
- Treat exclusion as a last resort rather than the first or only option,
- Make a concerted effort to understand the roots of behavior problems,
- Find ways to reconnect students to the educational mission of schools during disciplinary events, and
- Remove subjective offenses from the menu for discipline and ensure that every offense has clear, objective parameters.

Actively pursue and maintain family and community involvement. Fostering collaborative relationships with individuals who are members of students' culture will increase educators' understanding of student background. This partnership will, therefore, minimize students' disconnect from school environment and assist schools with effective, culturally competent management of student behavior.

Teach Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM). CRCM is pedagogical approach to running classrooms for all children in a culturally responsive way. Using this approach, teachers mindfully recognize their biases and cultural values and reflect on how these influence their behavior expectations and interactions with students; become knowledgeable about students' cultural backgrounds, while being careful not to form

stereotypes; examine the broader, social, economic and political context in which all members of the school exist; filter all decision making about the physical environment in which students learn through a lens of cultural diversity making sure that many different cultures, including the students' backgrounds, are represented; and commit to building a caring classroom community by actively developing relationships with students.

Teachers should utilize a "So What" Test. While clear behavioral expectations are necessary to create and maintain an environment conducive to academic and social learning, some expectations have more to do with power and control than a student's learning. When a student's behavior doesn't conform to a certain expectation, a teacher or administrator can ask him/herself, "So what if the students work together on an assignment instead of alone?" or "So what if the student wants to partially stand while doing his work?" By assessing what is the latent harm of a behavior, a teacher can direct teaching time and effort at rules that safeguard and enhance student education and learning environments. Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008), *Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies*, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

Implications for Research

In retrospect, did my study answer the questions? What implications might these teachers' philosophies of teaching and the personal strategies they use with their students be? One implication from the teachers' philosophies and experiences is that their personal philosophies and experiences drive their decision making in implementing personal strategies

to make connections with their students. It is important to make these personal connections with their students before they can engage the students in their academic instruction. The personal strategies they used depended on the individual needs of their students, as with all their students, but especially for their students who were struggling. These teachers worked very hard in their planning for day to day climate in their classrooms as well as academic success. Knowing if the children had “infrastructure”, (as classroom teacher A-6 spoke of), needs of basic school supplies, snacks, lunch and money to pay for field trips or needs, for example, time, consideration, support, self-confidence, social skills, consistency and structure or both was critical. Second, the better the teachers knew what barriers they could encounter while working with their students, the more prepared they were to provide for the needs and to choose the personal strategies they could implement to establish a safe, positive, and motivating classroom environment.

The personal strategies these teachers used were a result of taking the time at the beginning of each school year to learn about their students personally, to find out how they think and feel about themselves and how or what the students would need in order to connect their environment with the academic environment. Knowing how to reach the students personally was key to knowing from what prior knowledge they might have or not have to understanding, applying and making connections to the benefits for them of this new knowledge and school experiences.

Providing opportunities to build background knowledge, modeling use of formal

register language, being consistent and there for their students, and emphasizing building their self-confidence and encouraging them to not quit provide strong foundations.

Once teachers are cognizant of their cultural bias (es), the implementation of RtI would be a more successful endeavor. At the individual school level, there must be a strong foundation as well as a set of specific standards by which to follow.

Wise County had put plans in action to avoiding pitfalls to full scale implementation. There are several pitfalls that schools must avoid if they want to develop an effective RtI process. Initially, school administrators must build awareness and understanding of RtI in their individual school(s). Building awareness and understanding goes beyond defining RtI and demonstrating practices associated with RtI. It involves helping others to see;

- The need for RtI (e.g., how schools have not met the needs of students who struggle but who do not meet former discrepancy criteria),
- How it relates to other mandates (e.g., No Child Left Behind and Adequate Yearly progress),
- How it relates to shared values in the school (e.g., that every child should receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education),
- How it intersects with other practices going on in the building (e.g. how an existing problem-solving team structure can be used as a part of the process).

Many innovations fail because school personnel lack clarity about what they are and what they involve. Another pitfall, however, is when there is false clarity, in which an innovation

is oversimplified and people think they understand what to do when in reality they do not grasp the complexity and intricacies of the new innovation. In the case of RtI, false clarity will result if schools jump ahead too quickly to eligibility determination models when other practices are not yet in place (e.g. data-based problem solving).

Future studies might include the voices of students as to why they feel they are successful with their teachers (as a unit of analysis), as there is a critical degree of fluidity in that dynamic. Therefore it would be most advantageous to add it to the list of variable that create any learning environment. A longitudinal study of student success following their experience with their teachers could be conducted to assess a long term effect or benefit of the instruction. These studies might also include teachers from other school systems and geographic regions of the state that are demonstrating success with this student population. Then a comparison study could be done to identify similarities and differences in the personal and instructional strategies used by these additional teachers (extension of this study) and in teachers from different areas. A future study might also be to interview and observe principals to identify characteristics in school administrators who are experiencing success consistently with the free and reduced lunch student population in their schools. With the restrictions increasing in accessing information to identify free and reduced lunch students, future studies may need to consider the possibility of interviewing family members of these students to gain permission to study their children and/or information relating to their children's school success.

Another point to make about being a reflective practitioner is that none of these teachers verbalized this skill as being important for an effective teacher. They discussed at length the results of being reflective, such as finding different ways to teach kids, figuring out what needs to be changed or fixed, reaching kids at their performance levels and in their behavior issues and creating classrooms that is effective and successful for children.

By utilizing the research of Dr. Claude Steele (2010) renowned for his work on stereotype threat and its application to define real-world dilemmas, as the African-American underperformance of female students in math and science classes as well as students in the entire academic contexts. Initially, Steele began to explore the issues surrounding “stereotypic threat” when his participation on a university committee required him to confront the problem of academic underachievement of minority students at the university. He soon realized that the dropout rate for African American students was much higher than for their White peers, even though they were good students and had received excellent SAT scores. This led him to form a hypothesis involving stereotype threat. Stereotype threat refers to the threat felt in particular situations in which stereotypes relevant to one’s group identity exist, and simply the knowledge of the stereotypes could be distracting enough to negatively affect one’s performance in a domain related to the stereotype. His research further demonstrated the far-reaching implications of stereotype threat by showing it is more likely to undermine the performance of individuals who are highly invested in the domain being threatened. This theory of the stereotype threat could be applied to better understand

group differences in performance not only in intellectual situations, but in athletics as well. In his book, *Whistling Vivaldi* he focuses on the phenomenon of stereotype threat as it explains the trend of minority underperformance in higher education. Steele discusses how identity contingencies, or those cues in an environment that signal particular stereotypes attached to an aspect of one's identity, can have a dramatically negative effect on a person's functioning, and how those effects can explain racial and gender performance gaps in academic performance.

In this context, how would this apply to minority students? In the White European culture, where are written and unwritten rules seep into the school environs by way of the teacher(s) native culture, it is not a far reach to see the outcome of a minority student in that setting. Growing up with differing norms and mores, the minority child is in a situation that may cause lower self esteem, snowballing into greater difficulties.

Empirical Application

For the process of an enhanced unbiased, or less biased stance when assessing and observing students, there are crucial domains that must be in place in assuring the best result for the child. As many teachers may truly feel they are without bias, the application of a standard RtI procedure is paramount in precluding overt discrimination, even when the teacher is unaware of its existence. They are procedural integrity, fragmentation, and school readiness.

Procedural Integrity

The term “procedural integrity” refers to the degree to which specified RtI procedures are implemented as planned. For some children, the end result of RtI means verification for special education or related services. Therefore, it is essential that the procedures and core RtI components be correctly and consistently applied. Missing steps or incorrectly followed procedures may invalidate the process for a student. Only when RtI procedures are implemented with high levels of procedural integrity (consistency) can data be used for eligibility decision making.

Procedural integrity should be monitored by putting safeguards in place that increase accountability for accurate procedural implementation. Detailed record keeping is essential to document levels of procedural integrity for each child and to monitor a school’s implementation strengths and weaknesses across cases. In monitoring procedural integrity, a checklist can be developed which includes the substantive procedural steps of the RtI process. Besides reflecting best practice, the steps also should safeguard children’s rights. At a minimum, the RtI procedural checklist should address:

1. Legal and ethical requirements,
2. Assessment needs, including screening, baseline, and ongoing progress monitoring,
3. Goal setting and plan development,
4. Treatment integrity monitoring,

5. Plan evaluation, and
6. Planning and outcomes of decision-making meetings.

Implementation of each step is recorded by team members and/or an assigned case manager and the date of completion for each step is noted. In this way, accountability is maintained and case progress is monitored and recorded.

The emphasis for school teams is to complete each step in the RtI process with the highest levels of integrity. If one or more steps are not being completed or are completed with low integrity, school personnel must investigate why and correct the situation. The process as a whole is just as important as any one step. The educational decisions being made about students through this process significantly alter their educational future. If the process is not completed as designed, the children's education may suffer.

Fragmentation

Fragmentation of services represents another significant pitfall to effective implementation of RtI. Fragmentation occurs when professionals end up doing their job in isolation from one another. For eligibility determination, it was easier when the school psychologist could call a student to his or her office to administer intelligence and achievement tests. The discrepancy that was calculated did not rely on coordinated efforts across personnel, which made it more convenient. But, it was the students who failed to benefit from this error-prone practice.

Schools can avoid the pitfall of fragmented services by developing active stakeholder

participation across a broad variety of roles, including administration, teachers (both regular education and special education), related service personnel, specialists, coordinators, and parents. Without broad, active involvement, each person in a different role will go about his or her business and a comprehensive response to the child's needs will not occur. Doing RtI well requires tighter and more integrated coordination of services.

School Readiness

Possibly the most significant drawback (and one that cuts across all those already described) is adopting an innovation prematurely; that is, before there is an sufficient infrastructure for an innovation. There are several conditions that must already exist before schools are ready to implement RtI, including:

1. A school-wide awareness, understanding, and knowledge of the rationale for and structural elements of RtI.
2. A functioning team leadership for RtI at the level of the school building, including someone who serves as a coordinator at the building level.
3. Integration of services across roles and personnel across all levels of service delivery.

Mainstreaming

1. Mainstreaming occurs at the point of the possible benefits of bringing a special-needs child into the regular classroom.
2. At the same time, they realize that full-time inclusion might not provide the best

learning experience for the special-needs child or the other children in the class.

3. Children who are mainstreamed spend part of their day in a resource room where they can receive more individualized attention from teachers and gradually spend more time with their peers in the regular education classroom setting (if adequate progress is made).
4. Having the regular and special education teacher collaborate, the “dipping in to the regular class can occur allowing the child to slowly acclimate to a new learning environment.

By using both the regular classroom and individualized time in special education classes, pupils are exposed to mainstream students but get the attention they need for their specific challenges improves academic achievement, self-esteem and social skills. The RtI process precedes the dipping in of the child but share similar strategies. The boundaries between the regular and special education are not so discrete. It is a positive step when assisting children who are struggling.

Table 5.1: RtI Ongoing Procedural Steps

EC PEPs (personalized educational plan)	The RtI district team must discuss the logistics of progress monitoring these students in more detail.
Speech/Language and LD in listening comprehension and oral expression	There have been many questions about procedures for referring students for speech/language, as well as how to determine the difference between listening comprehension and oral expression. The RtI district team, with assistance from the speech/language specialists, will be working on some guidelines to provide assistance
Procedures for emergency cases	The EC Department and Student Support Services will be creating procedures to follow for students who are in immediate need of support. Currently, there is a draft to use as a guide.
Assessment Tools	The district must continue to look for easy to use assessment tools.

Each of these features is related to one or more of the downfalls to efficient change. RtI requires school-wide “buy-in” and support. But, there must be a functioning team that will take leadership with coordinating efforts (i.e., training and institutionalizing new procedures) throughout the school. The team must be certain that services are integrated across role personnel, for fear that RtI could fall into the fragmentation. Finally, schools need to create an infrastructure supporting the practices carried out at all levels of service delivery. This infrastructure includes resources, professional development, ongoing case and data management, assessment and evaluation activities, and intervention services.

Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) is a large initiative that Wise County is moving to implement. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has provided LEAs with training and some state guidelines. However there are several components of RtI that

are left up to the individual LEAs. As Wise County moves forward with implementation, they will be identifying district procedures. Due to the size of this initiative and the newness of the initiative for the state, some trial and error are expected. Therefore, staff must be aware that the District RtI Team must continually work diligently to address concerns schools may have, in order to meet the needs of the students.

Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations of this study included the length of time provided to complete the traditional calendar for the public schools and the calendar for the researcher's university. The study only included two schools within the same county and did not use longevity as a variable. A richer description of how these teachers taught and their relationships with their students could have been gained from increasing the number of observations of two per school to three. That would give a broader view of teachers performance with a variety of different students in different situations (and classroom cultures). Conducting two observations before the winter break, the first one taking place within the first three weeks of school, and two observations after the winter break, one occurring at the beginning of the third quarter and a fourth one occurring at the end of the third quarter or beginning weeks of the fourth quarter, would be my recommendation.

Obtaining school system permission to conduct one of these observations during the beginning weeks of the school year could prove difficult, in that the window for conducting research in the schools may not open until late in the first quarter or early in the second

quarter. A possible limitation of extending the window of time for observations to the fourth quarter of the public school system's calendar is that of the researcher's university calendar ending earlier than the school system's calendar. This difference in calendars requires data collection and study completion for the university calendar to be considered well before fourth quarter of a traditional calendar for a public school begins.

By adding to the number of observation more time to analyze and synthesize the additional data would be required, therefore extending the time needed to complete the study. As time to complete this study with suggested changes in the methodology would need, it would be essential that those time issues would not be a limiting factor(s).

Recruiting teacher participants through their principals was both an advantage and limitation to this study. An advantage was that I did not need to gain consent to review teachers' confidential TPAIs to see if they had been rated standard or above standard. It was a limitation in that I was dependent on principals to recommend only teachers who they knew to have met the TPAI selection criterion. I was not able to confirm that the teachers have met this criterion. However, based on my communication with the principals I believe that the principals were careful to recommend teachers who met the selection criterion. Another limitation of this study was that only two teachers were interviewed and observed at each grade level. However, the flexibility of the case study design allowed me to research as many teachers as necessary, for as long a time needed, until the data became saturated.

Studying teachers from other geographic areas of the state and other school systems

would enrich the data for comparisons of the findings from this study to the findings of these other teachers who successfully teach students of many cultures, who enter school on an unlevel playing field, yet maintain few referrals to special education as a result of their teaching style(s), and individualization/differentiation within their classroom. Restricting the study to one school system was a good foundation study, but limited the findings from being compared to a broader range of teachers. Gaining consent from teachers, principals, and the school system was a limiting factor in this study.

Finally, a limiting piece of this study, but one that could be considered for future studies, was not including interviews with economically disadvantaged students who have experienced success with these teachers. Adding the voice of the students to the teachers' voices would have enhanced the findings of the study.

Conclusion

This study has been a long journey in understanding what the impact of a teacher(s) personal beliefs and practices have on the success of the individual student within their classroom. Educational decisions about minority populations reflect the underlying question of whether the prevailing philosophy is one of assimilation of minority cultures into the mainstream of the dominant culture, or of the preservation of minority cultures within an overall national identity. A pluralistic philosophy will be reflected in policies that strive to respect and respond to the needs of culturally diverse children and families (Poplin & Wright, 1983).

Suggested Applications:

self-assessment

1. Teachers need to recognize cultural biases in their own lives.
2. The best method would be to list the assumptions they have made about students based on race, nationality, national origin and gender.
3. Once seeing it written down, it helps them to better recognize cultural biases in their own subjective views and how they need to be more sensitive to cultural biases expressed in the classroom.

language patterns

1. Use gender and race neutral language when lecturing and writing and avoid colloquialism that may be perceived as biased or demeaning,
2. Eliminate assumptions about other people from their speech and writing.
3. Treat every student with respect and appreciate their individuality without regard to their cultural, ethnic, racial or nationality.
4. Never presume that students from one culture may perform better or need more help than students from another culture.
5. Avoid using labels and grouping people from certain areas of the world.

Prior experiences can positively influence teachers' beliefs, thereby promoting effective teaching practices is paramount. Teachers need to recognize the importance of language and culture in the acquisition of knowledge. Teachers' professional development is

not static in that personal experiences may initially influence teachers' beliefs, but those beliefs are modified or reaffirmed through increased knowledge by way of specialized experiences and teacher training. Most of the teachers spoken with in this study did not truly realize how experiences and beliefs influenced their teaching practices. Given this, supporting ongoing teachers' critical reflective practice is essential in order to challenge and change the status quo and shape the process of educating our children with more understanding and appreciation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Protocols for Interviews of School Personnel

School Administrators (2 schools)

School Counselors (2 schools)

Special Education Director (county office)

Special Education Teachers (1 department chair per school (especially vital with snowball sampling) a and b; 5 special education teachers per school a and b).

Regular Education Teachers (grade level chairs (especially vital with snowball sampling) kindergarten through grades 5 regular education a and b).

Protocol: School Administrator(s):

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of school administrators' perspectives regarding the special education referral process and factors that might contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The interview should last approximately one hour. I would ask for consent to tape the interview for purposes of our data collection. The taping would remain confidential, as the tape is to be destroyed after it has been transcribed, and you will not be identified by name in any of my reports. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Section A: Staff Training:

1. Has your training and experiences prepared you for handling the diversity of students in this school; what types of experiences or training are most useful?
2. Do you think that this school has sufficient resources to address the needs of students throughout the school?

3. What types of factors would be most helpful in addressing those needs?
4. Are there some groups of students that resources are more adequate for; less adequate for; which groups?
5. With students having learning/behavioral difficulties, are there sufficient resources to meet their diverse needs in the general education classroom as well as in the school?
6. What resources, if available, would be helpful in changing the rate of special education referral for these students?
7. What resources could be made available to assist in a greater cultural connection with students?
8. Do you feel there has been a cultural shift in your school over the past 5-10 years? If so, how has your staff been trained to meet the needs of the students?
9. What is the school's policy/ practice when initially deciding a child will not gain from in class intervention but needs referral for special education services? Is there a county wide policy or is it subjective?

Appendix B: Interview and Questions Protocol: School Counselor

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of school counselors' perspectives regarding the special education referral process and factors that might contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The interview should last approximately one hour. I would ask for consent to tape the interview for purposes of our data collection. The taping would remain confidential, as the tape is to be destroyed after it has been transcribed, and you will not be identified by name in any of my reports. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Section A: Pre-Referral Interventions;

1. Describe the role that you have with students prior to special education referral including formal or informal steps that happen between the identification and placement of a student.
2. Are pre-referral interventions a required component of the referral process?
3. Who ensures that these steps are met?
4. Do you work with teachers in developing those interventions?
5. Is there a structured process in place that you follow for the pre-referral intervention? Is it a countywide process and a written policy?
6. What steps occur between the identification of a student who may need additional assistance and the actual referral process?
7. Describe how the pre-referral process works and who participates in the process?
8. How are decisions made? Are they policy driven? Is it a written policy? Is it countywide to maintain an objective standardization?
9. Do you feel there has been a cultural shift in the schools in the last 5-10 years? If so, has the staff been trained accordingly?
10. Do you feel protocols are the same throughout the county? If not why?

Appendix C: Interview and Questions: Director of Special Education (District Level)

I am trying to get a better understanding of what is involved in identifying and referring students for special education services and am interviewing special education administrators to get your perspective and understanding of the decision-making process. The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of District Director's perspectives regarding the special education referral process and factors that might contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The interview should last approximately one hour. I would ask for consent to tape the interview for purposes of our data collection. The taping would remain confidential, as the tape is to be destroyed after it has been transcribed, and you will not be identified by name in any of my reports. Do you have any questions before we get started?

A. General Information:

1. Is there a particular philosophy or mission statement for special education in this District? Is there a written policy/ practice for schools when initially requesting identification and testing a particular child "subjectivity" free?

B. Minority Disproportionality:

2. Do you feel that it exists? If so do you see it specifically in certain locations?
3. What are your guesses or hypotheses about what is most contributing to disproportionate referral of some groups to special education? (Develop each reason. If it leads into one of our topical areas, use that to move to the probe questions in that block of questions).

C. Diversity/ Resources:

4. How would you describe the student population in your school district?
5. How would you describe the effects of the population on teachers if there is a cultural mismatch? Do you consider that an element in overidentification?
6. Does the nature/culture of students vary by school? How so? Is the school response to these students (or families) varied by school within the district?
7. Do you feel that there has been a cultural shift at your school in the past 5-10 years?
8. What resources could be addressed to enhance a greater cultural connection between staff and student(s)?
9. Is there a written policy enabling an objectivity in place?

Appendix D: Interview and Questions: Classroom Teacher(s) (Regular and Special Education)

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of teachers' perspectives regarding the special education referral process and factors that might contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of teacher's perspectives regarding the special education referral process and factors that might contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. The interview should last approximately one hour. I would ask for consent to tape the interview for purposes of our data collection. The taping would remain confidential, as the tape is to be destroyed after it has been transcribed, and you will not be identified by name in any of my reports. Do you have any questions before we get started?

A: Identification (regular education teacher) Go to section B if special education teacher:

1. In your career here as a teacher, have you ever referred a student for special education services? What characteristics do you see in a child that initiates that referral? If yes, for what? (i.e. state a scenario or action leading to a behavior that leads to a consequence).
2. Why do you think you have never had to refer a child? Or if you have why do you feel it was justified? Did you ask for assistance from other school personnel/ special education department for suggestions?
3. What would indicate to you that the process of special education referral might need to be initiated for this student?
4. What pieces of information would be most important? What do you look for?

Section B: Special education teachers:

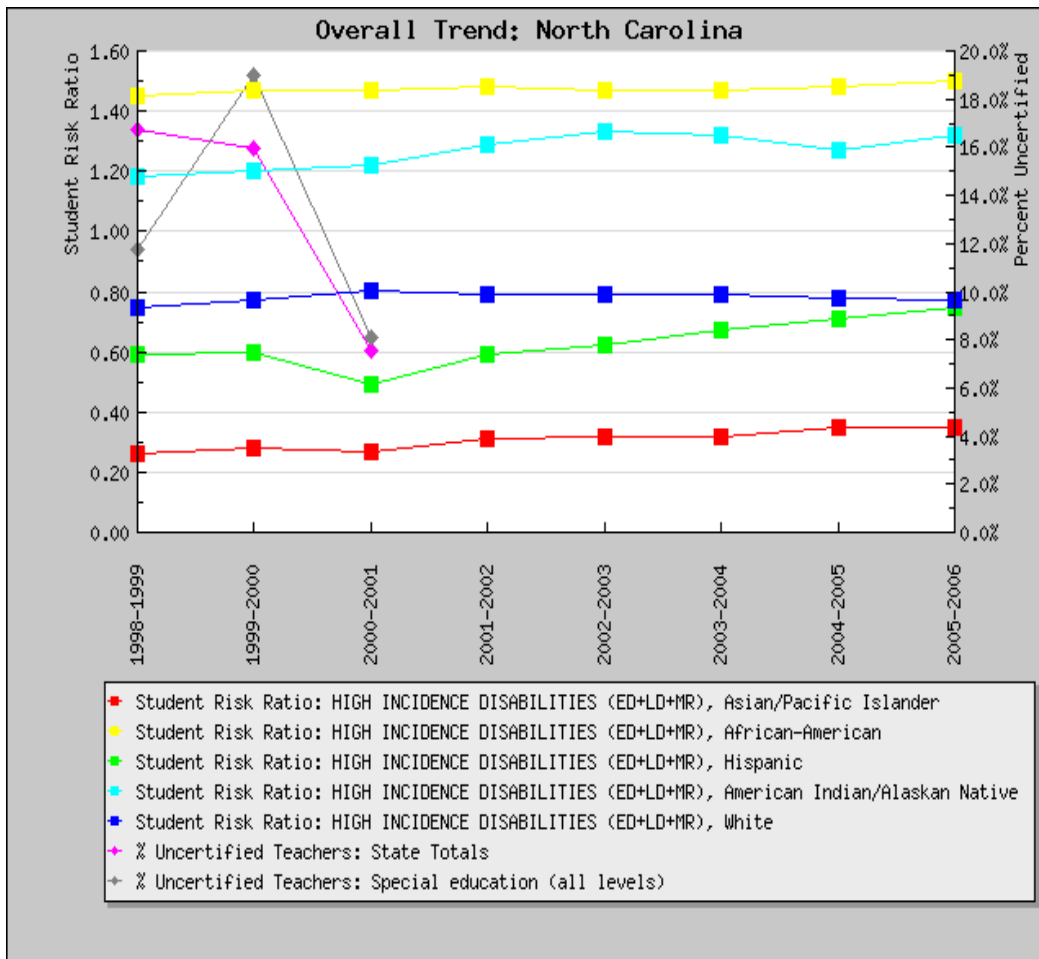
A: Identification:

5. Do you see certain characteristics of particular teaching styles less attuned with that of certain groups of students? Is that an issue in this school?
6. Is there stability in referrals within grade level, gender, age, race, and teacher? If not can you discuss your thoughts on why/why not?
7. As a special educator, do you have suggestions as to standards and practices that would be more productive and efficient in keeping more children in the regular education classroom?
8. Do you notice specific teachers tend to refer more students to SST on a continuing basis?
9. Is cultural mismatch between staff and student a possible and plausible factor?

Both special and regular education teachers:

10. Do you feel that there should be more training in cultural awareness? What would you suggest?
11. Do you feel that there has been a cultural shift at your school in the past 5-10 years?
Do you feel that you have enough training in preparation for this change?
12. Do you feel that an individual teacher's input can consequently determine a child's testing to placement?

Appendix E: Overall Trend: North Carolina



This table shows risk and risk ratio for each racial/ethnic group and disability type. It ranges from 1998-1999 through 2005-2006 within the state of North Carolina. Of all the “racial” groupings maintaining a consistent lead in the “soft” disability category is the African American student. The closer to 1.00 on the chart, the truer to each races’ most authentic, chaste score would/should be.

Appendix F: Percentage of Children Served under IDEA

Table Percentage of children ages 3 to 21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by race/ethnicity: 1998 to 2006

Year	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native
1998	8.0	8.0	10.3	6.7	3.6	9.5
1999	7.9	7.8	10.2	6.7	3.7	9.4
2000	8.2	8.1	10.8	6.8	4.0	10.5
2001	8.3	8.2	11.1	7.1	4.0	11.0
2002	8.4	8.3	11.3	7.3	4.2	11.4
2003	8.6	8.4	11.5	7.5	4.4	11.9
2004	8.7	8.4	11.6	7.7	4.5	13.3
2005	8.6	8.4	11.5	7.8	4.6	13.5
2006	8.6	8.3	11.4	7.8	4.6	13.6

http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/nativetrends/tables/table_2_3b.asp

Appendix G: Disability by Race in North Carolina

This table represents the national numbers, percentages, and percentage distributions of children ages 3 to 21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by race/ethnicity from 1998 through 2006. What is noticeable is the higher degree of Black and American Indian/Alaskan Natives who consistently maintain a greater percentile of children, by race, served under IDEA nationally.

Report of Children with Disabilities for Ages 6 through 21 by Race/Ethnicity and Disability for SY 2006-07, SY 2007-08 and SY 2008-09 (OSEP007C)

EDFacts Reporting System

This report provides the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and State Education Agencies (SEAs) with student counts for children with disabilities by race/ethnicity and disability. This information is provided for children ages 6 through 21. The report also provides a bar chart by race/ethnicity and child count by disability. These data come from EDFacts.

School year: 2008-2009
State: NORTH CAROLINA

This state has been approved to submit IDEA Child count data via EDFacts exclusively.

EDFacts data posted as of: Feb 27, 2009 2:24 PM

Percentage of children with disabilities in each race/ethnicity category for ages 6 through 21: SY 2008-2009

Race/ethnicity	Percentage ¹
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.73%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.00%
Black (not Hispanic)	35.31%
Hispanic	8.01%
White (not Hispanic)	53.94%
Total	100.00%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts (SY 2008-2009)

Appendix H: Interview Request

Name

Date

Address

Dear (Name),

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Leadership, and Adult Policy and Higher Education at North Carolina State University in the process of collecting data for my research study. My study aims to investigate the overrepresentation of minorities in special education.

Your thoughts and feelings are valued because they represent the feelings of many students like you. It is anticipated that the information you share will assist in providing successful teaching techniques for educators in the effort to decrease the referrals for testing in the exceptional realm and help decrease the broad discrepancy (ies).

I hope that you might be interested and willing to be interviewed and observed for such a study. These interviews and observation notes will be confidential and only I would know all of the identities. The interview should take between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview questions will cover your experiences and knowledge pertaining to teaching strategies used that have an impact on students, especially the minority students. In order to talk with you more freely, I would like to tape record our interview if you agree.

Ideally, I would like to complete most of my interviews and observations between now and the mid- April. I will call your school in the next few days to talk with you about

your willingness to participate and, hopefully, to discuss a convenient interview and observation time with you. I know you are very busy and do truly appreciate your consideration of my request.

Sincerely, Wynne Randy Smith

Appendix I: Field Note Forms

Field Note Form

Participant Code # _____

Purpose: Interview _____ Observation _____ Focus Group _____ Other _____

Date: _____ Location _____

Time Contact Began _____ Time Contact Ended _____

Surroundings:

Participant Reactions:

Researcher's Reactions:

Observation and Researcher Comments:

Appendix J: IRB Proposal

IRB For SPARCS office use only
Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)
Exempt Approved Approved pending modifications Table
Expedited Review Category: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8a 8b 8c 9

Reviewer Name Signature Date
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

This study is being conducted to explore how the county director of special education, two school counselors, two administrators, regular, and special education teachers in two elementary school settings have determined what role their beliefs and practice splay in the overrepresentation and overidentification of minorities in special education. This study is important in that it will examine how administrators and teachers deal with their own teaching styles and beliefs in student potential.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

This study is a dissertation research project to satisfy the requirements for the Ed.D. Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision.

B. SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research? Special and regular education teachers, counselors, and school principals from both schools, as well as the county director of special education. .

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

Subjects for the study are a purposeful sample chosen because of their connection to efforts to determine what role their beliefs and practice splay in the overrepresentation and overidentification of minorities in special education. This study is important in that it will examine how administrators and teachers deal with their own teaching styles and beliefs in student potential.

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures),

including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.
All subjects in the study are certified school teachers who teach or have taught in this study's school setting.

Appendix K: Submission for Studies

North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
SUBMISSION FOR NEW STUDIES
Title of Project: A Case Study of Which Beliefs and Practices Fosters Or Inhibits the
Overidentification
and Overrepresentation Of Minority Students In Elementary Special Education Classes
Principal Investigator Wynne Randy Smith Department Educational Administration &
Leadership Studies

Source of Funding (required information): None
(if externally funded include sponsor name and university account number)

Campus Address (Box Number)
Email: rsmith616@hotmail.com Phone: 919 894-1704 work 919 856-7676

RANK: Faculty
Student: Undergraduate; Masters; or PhD Other (specify): Ed.D. student

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the
University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the
Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as
outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be
submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to
implementation.

Principal Investigator:
Wynne Randy Smith
(typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly
and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal
investigator of record.

Faculty Sponsor:
Lance Fusarelli, Ph.D., Matt Militello, Ph.D.

(typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

PLEASE COMPLETE IN DUPLICATE AND DELIVER, ALONG WITH A PROPOSAL
NARRATIVE, TO:

Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, or email as an attachment to debra_paxton@ncsu.edu

For SPARCS office use only
Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)

Exempt Approved Approved pending modifications Table
Expedited Review Category: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8a 8b 8c 9

Reviewer Name Signature Date

North Carolina State University

Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must

contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

This study is being conducted to explore how both school counselors, administrators, special and regular education teachers in two elementary school settings, as well as the county director of special education have determined what role their beliefs and practice play in the overrepresentation and overidentification of minorities in special education. This study is important in that it will examine how administrators and teachers deal with their own teaching styles and beliefs in student potential.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

This study is a dissertation research project to satisfy the requirements for the Ed.D. Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision.

B. SUBJECT POPULATION

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research? The county director of special education. Regular and special education teachers, 2 school principals, and 2 school counselors.

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used. Subjects for the study are a purposeful sample chosen

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

All subjects in the study are certified schoolteachers who teach or have taught in this study's school setting.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

N/A

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

I am currently serving as a special education teacher in the county but do hold a principal's license and have taught special education at different levels for eighteen years.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study:

minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature

fetuses

pregnant women

persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities

persons with physical disabilities

economically or educationally disadvantaged

prisoners

elderly

students from a class taught by principal investigator

other vulnerable population.

If any of the above is used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects.

Participants will be interviewed in two focus groups and there will be member checks for each interview by the interviewees. Two of the participating teachers working in other states will be interviewed by the principal investigator. All participants, the school site, and school district will be assigned a pseudonym to protect anonymity.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

1 to 2 hours will be required of each subject in the study to interview, do member checks, and follow-up meetings. These will be done at times so as not to interfere with regular school-day activity.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS

1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks. There are no known risks; however, a request to do research will be sent to the school district office outlining what I intend to do in the study. Also any data collected from student work or school-generated data will be named with a pseudonym to protect the school, teachers, administrators and the school district. Further, all participants will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form before participating in the study.

Appendix L: Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study A CASE STUDY OF WHICH BELIEFS AND PRACTICES FOSTER OR INHIBIT THE OVERIDENTIFICATION AND OVERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Principal Investigator Wynne Randy Smith Faculty Sponsor (if applicable) Dr. Lance Fusarelli and Dr. Matt Militello, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
We are asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is investigate teacher beliefs and practices contributing to the overidentification of minorities in special education.

INFORMATION

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one to one taped interview, one classroom observation, and will be asked to attend two focus groups within your particular school.

RISKS

There are no perceived risks with your participation. You will be assigned a pseudonym and referred to by that pseudonym during the taping of the interview, the classroom observation, and the focus group meetings, to protect your anonymity as well as that of the school, the school's administration, and the school district. Should you feel that your participation could prove detrimental to you, personally or professionally, you may withdraw at any time during the study.

Appendix M: TPAI-R

TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 2

Above Standard

At Standard

Below Standard

Unsatisfactory

2. Major Function: Management of Student Behavior

2.1 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern the handling of routine administrative matters.

2.2 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern student verbal participation and talk during different types of activities---whole class instruction, small group instruction.

2.3 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern student movement in the classroom during different types of instructional activities.

2.4 Teacher frequently monitors the behavior of all students during whole-class, small group, and seatwork activities and during transitions between instructional activities.

2.5 Teacher stops inappropriate behavior promptly and consistently, yet maintains the dignity of the student.

2.6 Teacher analyzes the classroom environment and makes adjustment to support learning and enhance social relationships.

Comments _____

Above Standard

At Standard

Below Standard

Unsatisfactory

3. Major Function: Instructional Presentation

3.1 Teacher links instructional activities to prior learning.

3.2 Teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning activities that make these aspects of subject matter understandable and meaningful for students.

3.3 Teacher speaks fluently and precisely.

3.4 Teacher provides relevant examples and demonstrates to illustrate concepts and skills.

3.5 Teacher assigns tasks and asks appropriate levels of questions that students handle with a high rate of success.

- 3.6 Teacher conducts the lesson or instructional activity at a brisk pace, slowing presentations when necessary for student understanding but avoiding unnecessary slowdowns.
- 3.7 Teacher makes transitions between lessons and between instructional activities within lesson effectively and smoothly.
- 3.8 Teacher makes sure that assignment is clear.
- 3.9 The teacher creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
- 3.10 The teacher uses instructional strategies that encourage the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
- 3.11 The teacher uses technology to support instruction.
- 3.12 The teacher encourages students to be engaged in and responsible for their own learning.

Comments _____

TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 3

- Above Standard
- At Standard
- Below Standard
- Unsatisfactory

4. Major Function: Instructional Monitoring

- 4.1 Teacher maintains clear, firm, and reasonable work standards and due dates.
- 4.2 Teacher circulates to check all students' performances.
- 4.3 Teacher routinely uses oral, written, and other work products to evaluate the effects of instructional activities and to check student progress.
- 4.4 Teacher poses questions clearly and one at a time.
- 4.5 Teacher uses student responses to adjust teaching as necessary.

Comments _____

- Above Standard
- At Standard
- Below Standard
- Unsatisfactory

5. Major Function: Instructional Feedback

- 5.1 Teacher provides feedback on the correctness or incorrectness of in-class work to

encourage student growth.

5.2 Teacher regularly provides prompt feedback on out-of-class work.

5.3 Teacher affirms a correct oral response appropriately and moves on.

5.4 Teacher provides sustaining feedback after an incorrect response by probing, repeating the question, giving a clue, or allowing more time.

5.5 The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

Comments _____

Above Standard

At Standard

Below Standard

Unsatisfactory

6. Major Function: Facilitating Instruction

6.1 Teacher has long- and short-term instructional plans that are compatible with school and district curricular goals, the school improvement plan, the NC Standard Course of Study, and the diverse needs of students and the community.

6.2 Teacher uses diagnostic information obtained from tests and other formal and informal assessment procedures to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner.

6.3 Teacher maintains accurate records to document student performance.

6.4 Teacher understands how students learn and develop and plans appropriate instructional activities for diverse student needs and different levels of difficulty.

6.5 Teacher uses available human and material resources to support the instructional program.

Comments _____

TPAI-R Experienced Teacher Full-Review Form 4

Above Standard

At Standard

Below Standard

Unsatisfactory

7. Major Function: Communicating within the Educational Environment

- 7.1 Teacher treats all students in a fair and equitable manner.
- 7.2 Teacher participates in the development of a broad vision of the school.
- 7.3 Teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and community agencies to support students' learning and well being.

Comments _____

- Above Standard
- At Standard
- Below Standard
- Unsatisfactory

8. Major Function: Performing Non-Instructional Duties

- 8.1 Teacher carries out non-instructional duties as assigned and/or as need is perceived to ensure student safety outside the classroom.
- 8.2 Teacher adheres to established laws, policies, rules, and regulations.
- 8.3 Teacher follows a plan for professional development and actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.
- 8.4 Teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his or her decisions and actions on students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community.

Comments _____

Evaluator's Summary:
Comments

Teacher's Reactions to Evaluation

Evaluator's Signature and Date

*Teacher's Signature and Date

*Signature indicates that the written evaluation has been seen and discussed and does not necessarily indicate agreement.

Appendix N: RtI Process

The philosophy behind RtI includes

All children can learn,

Focus on meeting the needs of all children,

Wealth of knowledge and partnership from parents,

Work collaboratively to develop solutions and strategies,

Proactive instruction within general education,

Prevention more cost effective than remediation,

Utilize resources necessary to meet the educational needs of all children,

Evaluate effectiveness of educational strategies frequently,

Communicate accurate information about student progress regularly,

Provide opportunities for all children to achieve their goals, and

Best educational strategy: the one that works!

Important Points include:

School-based collaborative process

Uses problem solving approach to identify academic/behavior needs

Involves data-based decision-making

Primary purpose is to design useful interventions in the regular education environment

The focus is on Problem-Solving NOT a mechanism for referring students to special education,

Is NOT a pre-referral team,

Assessment is functional & diagnostic,

Interventions based on data NOT a guessing game.

There are a few challenges that face implementation of RtI model which cause inconsistencies:

Fidelity of Implementation (as well as individualized interpretations),

Resource variances among counties,

Funding Concerns/Issues,

Issues surrounding transition from discrepancy model to RtI model,

Ownership for implementation to effect system change, and

Staff concerns regarding job security,

Tier1

At Tier I, student concerns are addressed by informal parent and teacher conferences. Should be started when the teacher realizes a student is either struggling to learn the core curriculum or having difficulty maintaining appropriate behavior in the general education classroom or when the student is required to have Personalized Education Plan (PEP).

The core curriculum is a systematic, consistently delivered curriculum adopted by the district and used throughout with fidelity. If the core curriculum is delivered inconsistently or with variability from class to class it will be not possible to establish if the core is meeting expectations. It will also be impossible to develop strategic and individual interventions for a student if the core curriculum is deficient. The core curriculum should meet the needs of a majority of the students in the class. Activities at Tier I include the parent and teacher working together to:

Define the Problem:

What is it?

When does it occur?

Why is this happening?

Analyze baseline data or develop plan for collecting baseline data?

Certain guiding questions for defining the skill area incorporate:

In the area of (content, skill), peers are able to (What can they do?)

Compared to his/her peers (student) is able to (What can s/he do?)

How far off grade level (the learning gap) is (student) in this area?

Are there prerequisite skills that (student) must do in order to perform as well as his/her peers?

(If yes to #4) What skills can (the student) do and what skills is s/he not able to do?

Identify which skill(s) should be addressed.

When considering the skill area, some guiding insights must include:

Does it have endurance? Is the skill needed over time?

Does it have leverage? Will proficiency in this skill help the student in other areas of the curriculum and other academic disciplines?

Does it develop student readiness for the next level of learning? Is it essential for success as the student moves through the curriculum and/or to the next level?

Based on baseline data an intervention plan must be developed:

Parent and teacher together brainstorm ideas for interventions. Discuss what interventions look like. Look at differentiated instruction.

Develop progress monitoring plan

Set time table for reconvening to evaluate interventions

Implement intervention plan

Evaluate (Teacher and parent use progress monitoring data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions)

When writing goals educators must keep in mind the rate at which the student's peers are

progressing, identify a time frame for accelerating (the student's) learning to the level of his/her peers. This becomes the long-term goal. Using the long-term goal as a guide, the educator must determine reasonable short-term goal(s). Involving the parents enables both parties to be a part of the process, hopefully teasing out subjectivity (ies) and miscommunication.

The goal needs to be a SMART goal. This is a county and statewide standard:
S -specific; Well defined. Clear to anyone that has a basis knowledge,
M-measurable; Concrete criteria for measuring progress,
A-attainable; Challenging, but not out of reach,
R-realistic; Within the availability of resources, knowledge and time,
T-timely; Grounded within a time frame

Academic Intervention Design:

Focus: Ongoing monitoring and adjustments of instruction are designed to meet the needs of students

Design: Specific to the student's learning profile

Utilization of flexible grouping for differentiation of instruction based on skill level

Research-based classroom interventions designed to achieve grade-level content expectations

Minimum 2 to 3 intervention sessions per week

Interventionist: Primarily the classroom teacher and parent. Other school personnel may be involved in rare cases, when identified by need.

Setting: Intervention sessions should be occurring primarily in the general education classroom

Progress Monitoring: Must take place a minimum of once a month

Behavior Intervention Design:

Focus: Ongoing monitoring and adjustments of classroom and school-wide behavior expectations designed to meet the needs of students.

Design: Specific to the student's learning profile

Research-based classroom interventions designed to achieve behavioral expectations

Minimum 2 to 3 classroom behavioral lessons. (See PBS lessons)

Interventionist: Primarily the classroom teacher and parent. Other school personnel may be involved in rare cases, when identified by need.

Setting: Intervention sessions should be occurring primarily in the general education classroom.

Progress Monitoring: Must be reviewed a minimum of once a month.

Implementation :

Did the delivery of interventions follow the plan for implementation with accuracy and

consistency?

Is progress monitoring of the intervention used and adjustments made as needed?

Did the intervention match the student's specific need?

Evidence:

Does the instruction or the intervention decrease the student's learning gap (learning rate)?

Does the intervention reduce the problem behavior and/or increase the desired behavior?

Does progress monitoring data determine the intervention to be effective?

Does student performance improved as measured by assessment(s)?

Tier II

There are times when additional building staff is needed to address concerns. These concerns are addressed through informal consultation with additional professionals, to elicit their support, services and/or recommendations for an instructional plan.

Steps of cyclical problem-solving repeat, but more school personnel are involved as needed:

Parent

Teacher

Counselor, school psychologist, reading teacher, administrator, social worker, nurse, etc. The intensity of the interventions increase.

Academic Intervention Design :

Focus: The student receives supplementary instruction, in addition to the core instruction.

The intention of the supplementary instruction is to provide time-limited interventions with the goal of accelerating student learning to meet grade level expectations.

Design: Specific to the student's learning profile. Minimum of 2 interventions per area of need, Minimum of 3 to 4 intervention sessions per week. At least one intervention session per week must be provided in a small group setting (maximum of 5 to 7 students).

Interventionist: Classroom teacher and other school personnel as identified by need.

Setting: Appropriate setting as determined by the need; can be conducted in and out of the general education classroom

Progress Monitoring: Must take place a minimum of once every two weeks.

Behavior Intervention Design :

Focus: Student receives supplementary instruction in behavior or social skills, in addition to the core instruction. The intention of the supplementary instruction is to provide time-limited interventions with the goal of accelerating student learning to meet behavioral expectations.

Design: Specific to the student's learning profile. Minimum of 2 interventions per area of need (For example: behavior contract and small group social skills training). Minimum of 1 to 2 intervention sessions per week. At least one intervention must be provided in a small

group setting (maximum of 3 to 5 students).

Interventionist: Classroom teacher and other school personnel as identified by need. This may assist in “teasing” out subjectivity.

Setting: Appropriate setting as determined by the need; can be conducted in and out of the general education classroom

Progress Monitoring: Must take place a minimum of once every two weeks.

Evidence :

Does the instruction or the intervention decrease the student's learning gap (learning rate)?

Does the intervention reduce the problem behavior and/or increase the desired behavior?

Does progress monitoring data determine the intervention to be effective?

Does student performance improved as measured by assessment(s)?

Implementation:

Did the delivery of interventions follow the plan for implementation with accuracy and consistency?

Is progress monitoring of the intervention used and adjustments made as needed?

Did the intervention match the student's specific need?

Does the instruction or the intervention decrease the student's learning gap (learning rate)?

Does the intervention reduce the problem behavior and/or increase the desired behavior?

Does progress monitoring data determine the intervention to be effective?

Does student performance improved as measured by assessment(s)?

Are the assessments sustaining objectivity?

Tier III:

If the problem requires more specialized assessment and input, formal consultation with an RtI team may be warranted. The planning documentation, and data collection is very specific. The school's RtI Team will be primarily responsible for directing activities at this tier. The RtI Team is a collaborative team of general and special educators, including parents, who implement the RtI/Problem-Solving process for student at risk for school failure. Steps of cyclical problem-solving model repeat but in a more formal and systematic way with the RTI team.

Tier IV:

Through the process of problem solving, it could become apparent that additional resources and services would be needed to address the student concern. At this level, special

education services may be considered. If in agreement, parents would be asked to sign for permission to evaluate their child to determine the eligibility and need for special education services. However, the goal of the process is to intervene early, so that a student will not need special education. Upon that circumstance, the RtI team would complete an analysis of the Tier III research-based interventions. The documentation is reviewed for the following:
Documented modifications/discontinuation of the intervention or implementation of a new scientific research-based intervention.
Summary of conference(s) with parents, school staff, and the problems solving team.

Based on the review the following three options are considered :+

- Option 1: Modify the interventions and return the student to Tier II; or
- Option 2: Modify Tier III intervention (frequency, intensity, duration, or content) and implement the modifications; or
- Based on the review the following three options are considered:
 - Option 1: Modify the interventions and return the student to Tier II; or
 - Option 2: Modify Tier III intervention (frequency, intensity, duration, or content) and implement the modifications; or
 - Option 3: Move the student to Tier IV.

Activities at Tier IV include:

- Making the decision to refer for consideration of special education
- Team works together to define the problem
- Progress monitoring data becomes baseline data
- IEP (intervention) is developed based on data collected
- Progress monitoring occurs during implementation
- Program modification or exit criteria is established
- Long term and short term objectives are developed
- Option 3: Move the student to Tier I

Based on the review the following three options are considered:

1. Option 1: Modify the interventions and return the student to Tier II; or
2. Option 2: Modify Tier III intervention (frequency, intensity, duration, or content) implement the modifications; or
- 3, Option 3: Move the student to Tier IV.

Activities at Tier IV include:

Making the decision to refer for consideration of special education

Team works together to define the problem

Progress monitoring data becomes baseline data

IEP (intervention) is developed based on data collected

Progress monitoring occurs during implementation

Program modification or exit criteria is established

Long term and short term objectives are developed