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Educators' Perceptions About African American Student Referrals to Special Education

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The overrepresentation of African American (AA) students in special education is a problem in the United States, with concerns about the lack of uniformity in AA students' referrals to special education, and whether the referral process is applied consistently for all students. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of teachers, school counselors, and school administrators concerning the special education referral process, and whether the process was applied consistently for all students. The 2 theories providing the theoretical foundation were critical race theory and zone of proximal development. Criterion sampling was used to select 6 participants for this qualitative case study. The sample included 2 teachers, 2 school counselors, and 2 school administrators. Face-to face interviews were conducted and transcripts were analyzed using open coding with topical analysis to see if any patterns emerged concerning teachers', school counselors', and school administrators' perceptions of the special education referral process. Member checking was used to improve trustworthiness of the interpretations. Findings revealed that all participants were unaware of the disproportionate number of AA students in special education, and reported that they followed the established rules and procedures within the school to guide their referral decisions. In addition, all respondents identified their distinct role in the referral process, and indicated that when placed properly, students can benefit from special education placement. Positive social change may result by exploring stakeholder perceptions of the special education referral processes among school staff, and ensuring that those involved in special education referrals are applying processes consistently for all students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my two sons Jayshaun Amir Ely and Jahbree Ahmad Ely. Your love has given me the strength, commitment, and perseverance needed to complete this journey. I would also like to thank all of my family and friends who supported me. I am forever grateful.

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journey.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The overrepresentation of African American students in special education is emerging rapidly as a serious problem in the United States (Kunjufu, 2011). Yet, numerous schools across the nation do not recognize the implications nor the achievement gap and societal ramifications that occur because African American students are more likely to be associated with special education. For example, Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, and Kern, (2009) found that only one out of four African American students in special education eventually graduates from high school. This statistic is telling, but reducing the number of African American students in special education programs may increase the number of African American students who graduate.

At a selected New Jersey high school, African American students are more likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed (ED; Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012) compared to European American students. As a result, many educators believe (or have come to the conclusion) that most African American students are incapable of learning in a regular educational setting.

According to Serpell et al. (2009), minority students, most significantly African American students, 9th -12th grade, make up the majority of students who receive special education services in the United States. One example is found at this New Jersey high school. Among its over 1,000 students, 56% are African American. Of this 56%, 30% received special education services. It was evident that the majority (one out of three students) of the special education classrooms were filled with African American students at this New Jersey high school.

Hill (2009) reported that culture is an aspect that should always be considered when classifying students in different programs. African American students, 9th -12th grade, are often labeled as ED (Forness et al., 2012) and placed in special education programs on the basis of race alone (Kunjufu, 2011). According to a Title I survey given to educators at the selected New Jersey high school, the majority of the African American special education students were labeled ED. Understanding culture helps determine not only why people do things in a certain way. For example, it can also help understand how they learn. The lack of cultural understanding could be a reason for the rather large number of African American students being labeled as ED and placed in special education programs.

The referral process for recommending students into special education programs was a problem for the school that participated in this study (Public School Review, 2011). Washington (2010) found that previous research efforts demonstrated that some educators feel insufficiently prepared for meeting the demands of all student demographics in schools. This situation becomes more serious when one considers the demands placed upon educators by the increasing number of students that must be assisted. According to Stevens (2008), the results of the achievement gap is a division, not only in educational needs, but also in cultural separations among students and educators.

Counseling services in schools are a resource that should be used by any student who may need help to alleviate that educational divide considering the fact that counselors are educators as well. School counseling officially began at the turn of the 20th century, however, Lomotey (2009), asserted that most African American students

were in the workforce and not in schools at this time. African Americans and European Americans were receiving separate educations in the first half of the 20th century. Once schools became integrated, racism was still prevalent, and therefore, little counseling services were provided to African Americans. Recently, educators had been working proactively to address the academic concerns of African American students by employing more time-efficient techniques in the hopes of providing better assistance to students (Washington, 2010).

Currently, students who have special needs have an entitlement via government legislation to have a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This is articulated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 1975. Students may have the eligibility for services as found within other various federal legislations, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. According to VanSciver and Conover (2009), although these pieces of legislation have been enacted, African American students have not benefitted from these pieces of legislation. Serpell et al. (2009) discussed the fact that lacking appropriate educational support that help students with educational disabilities, puts African American students who have special needs at a great disadvantage for employment opportunities. As a result, the achievement gap and standard of living in culture and educational opportunities, the inequality will continue to rise without available resources for African American students (Kunjufu, 2011).

Problem Statement

The number of African American students with disabilities grades 9th -12th who are referred to special education at a New Jersey high school is out of proportion

compared to European American students. Some of the possible reasons include educators' perceptions and attitudes towards African American students. Communication between educators and students may not be effective because of stereotypes and lack of competence in knowing the importance and differences of race, class, and culture. This incompetence or not knowing may be why African American students, 9th -12th grade, do not feel confident in the support received from educators (Bryan & Gallant, 2012). This was important to consider because a healthy relationship needs to be established between a student and educator in order to have positive outcomes.

In order to improve the educational outcomes and goals of African American students, 9th -12th grades, who receive special education services, educators should pay adequate attention to academics as well as personal barriers. For instance, African American students may perceive the role of educators as extremely important in terms of providing extensive assistance and support for academic placement, as well as for choosing the most appropriate academic courses. Dealing with learners' personal and social concerns is another significant part of facilitating the relationship between student and educator.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative case study of educators' perceptions about African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs at a New Jersey high school. Stake (2006) discussed in a qualitative case study the researchers' focus on an issue or concern, and then selected one bounded case to illustrate the issue. This was important because getting the educators' perceptions illustrated how improvements could be made to appropriately reduce the number of African American

students being referred to special education. I reviewed the educator's handbook before an interview with six educators was conducted in order to see the specific job duties. This was important to have a clear understanding of how educators meet expectations and service students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What were general education teachers' perceptions concerning the referral process of African American students to special education?

Research Question 2: What were school counselors' perceptions concerning the referral process of African American students to special education?

Research Question 3: What were school administrators' perceptions concerning the referral process of African American students to special education?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore educators' perceptions about African American students, 9th-12th grade, who were referred for special education services. My intent, with this study, was to explore educators' perceptions of African American students, 9th-12th grade, to help reduce the number of students referred into special education. This study further aimed to help build a positive rapport between African American students, 9th-12th grade, and educators so that educators may be a resource for these students.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by two theories: critical race theory (CRT) and zone of proximal development (ZPD). The use of CRT as a framework was promising for attaining solid results about African American students for this study. The use of ZPD in this research was important, because as Silver (2011) explained, the role of education should be to provide students with engagement, achievement, and an optimal learning environment.

The use of CRT has been found effective and reliable for exploring the ways in which race and race-related issues affect the educational context for African American students (Roberts, 2010). In general, critical race theorists use analytical tools. For instance, they can analyze the myths and assumptions related to the common cultural ideas about race.

The theoretical approach of CRT in the belief of human agency is an extremely important idea in special education. According to Clark (2008), this means that human beings have the capacity to shape their own world. Even if people are influenced by the surrounding circumstances of their reality, they still possess the potential to act in a way that they want or consider to be appropriate. Based on this theoretical perspective, it was reasonable to use CRT as conceptual framework because it would enable the current research to have an opportunity to consider various perspectives throughout the study's process.

According to Roberts (2010), the use of CRT became especially important in education, in which the educational experience and results for both children and adults were often connected to racial background. CRT began as a response to interdisciplinary

legal studies. The earliest writings on CRT can be traced to the works of Derrick Bell (1970s), as a rejection of the belief that the legal reforms of the Civil Rights Movement positively affected both the construction and application of laws.

Woodland (2008) noted that educators needed to change the policies that were used in special education program decision-making along with the referral process. Policies such as IDEA and ADA, thereby, assisting educators in ensuring a safe and fair educational environment for African American students. According to Delgado (2009), many scholars support CRT, which indicated that the concept of race was influential and educators were advised to act accordingly to release the barrier that existed between African American students and educators.

The National Education Association (NEA, 2009) provided advice on sequential changes in the educator's role in the achievement of academic activities to ensure that the school environment was conducive to African American students (Washington, 2010). The NEA (2009) issued reports on how educators were expected to treat students with disabilities classified under special educational programs. Unfortunately, Washington (2010) found and explained that most school training programs did not specify what educators were envisioned to do. Wyatt (2009) argued, that educators needed to advocate for students in order to encourage in them a strong sense of personal power.

The second theory was the ZPD. The purpose of this theory was to show it is used for a task a child can complete independently, as well as those completed with the guidance and assistance of adults or more skilled children (Silver, 2011). According to theorist Lev Vygotsky, a more skilled educator adjusts the amount of guidance to fit the child's potential level of performance (Silver, 2011). Therefore, more support is offered

when a child is having difficulty with a particular task, and over time, less support is needed as the child makes gains on completing the task. This theory is important to the research in showing how the support from the educator to the student should improve over time. The purpose of the educator is to show students how to get through high school so they can become independent adults (Corsaro, 2011).

Educators can implement the use of ZPD as a strategic tool to help African American students stay motivated in school and reach graduation. According to Silver (2011), educators must raise the level of support for students through differentiated instruction. Although a challenge, it should be at a students' individual level. Educators help students build self-motivation when they use ZPD as part of differentiated instruction.

Operational Definitions

There were essential terms associated with educators' perceptions and attitudes towards African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs. The following terms were defined as they were used within this study:

Child Study Team. A team consisting of the parents of a child and educational professionals serving the child who convene to develop long and short range goals for the child's progress. The team meets before any special education testing takes place and will continue to meet if the child receives special education services as defined by the New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A (2011).

Critical Race Theory. An academic discipline focused upon the application of critical theory, a critical examination of society and culture, at the intersection of race, law, and power (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Disproportionality. Disproportionality exists when student representation in special education programs or specific special education categories exceeds their proportional enrollment in a school's general population. It is a structured probability that minority children are more likely to be labeled as having a disability (Blanchett, 2006).

Emotionally Disturbed. A condition exhibiting one or more of the special education characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student's educational performance as defined by the New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A (2011).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. A U.S. federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities. It addresses the educational needs of children with disabilities from birth to age 18 or 21 in cases that involve 14 specified categories of disability (2004).

Multiply Disabled. The presence of two or more disabling conditions, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a program designed solely to address one of the impairments as defined by the New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A (2011).

Overrepresentation. A situation occurring when the percentage of minority students in special education programs surpasses the percentage of the total number of minority students in the school population (Arnold & Lassmann, 2003).

Special Education. Refers to a range of educational and social services provided by the public school system and other educational institutions to individuals with disabilities who are between 3 and 21 years of age defined by the New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A (2011).

Specific Learning Disability. A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia as defined by the New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A (2011).

Zone of Proximal Development. This is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help (Silver, 2011).

Assumptions

In this study, I made three assumptions. The first was that I would not have any biases, since I do not have any connection to or authority over the participants who I interviewed. Secondly, I assumed that the participants were honest in their responses. The third assumption was that all educators were licensed professionals with at least 1 year of educational experience.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was based on possible overall problems with African American students, 9th -12th grade, which were being referred to special education programs. The study was conducted at a New Jersey high school. Six educators comprised the sample: two general education teachers, two school counselors, and two administrators.

Limitations

A limitation to the study was that the sample may not have been an accurate representative sample because it was only done at one high school in New Jersey. The sample size was small and this may have prevented the researcher from obtaining more relevant and objective data with implications for larger populations. All of the educators worked in the same school so because of possibly shared experiences there may not have been variety of ideas regarding the topic.

Significance of the Study

By discussing the importance of educators and their perceptions about African American students, 9th -12th grade, with hopes of reducing the number of referrals into special education programs, important implications for improving the status of this marginalized student group might have been found. This was done first by looking at the interpersonal relationships between African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs and educators. An examination of this type showed what barriers occurred at particular levels that may have caused one to think that African American students, 9th -12th grade, have higher developmentally- delayed levels. Educators can look at cultural and social affiliations with education as well as boundaries

that have been created. Noted by Strayhorn (2008), as school systems are able to eliminate the gaps between African American students and education, they will provide more opportunities for students and allow the relationship between the students and educators to be redefined.

This study may promote social change by helping African American students, 9th-12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs achieve success in school and also obtain success in their adult lives by building positive relationships in school. If educators ignore the increasing number of African American students, 9th -12th grade, who are being referred to special education programs, it could lead to greater complications in the future. One of the complications could be increased numbers of African Americans in our penal system. Therefore, a reliable way of avoiding such problems would be to improve the communication between these particular students who are being referred to special education programs and educators, which would allow the students to have positive attitudes and new perspectives about school and in life. Through educator awareness, students would increase self-esteem, make positive decisions, and also reduce the local high school dropout rate.

According to Wyatt (2009), the dropout rate of African American students was currently a national problem in the United States and is also a problem at this New Jersey high school. Enhanced communication was important for attaining positive educational outcomes. In addition, African American students, 9th -12th grade, would benefit from the recommendations given as a result of the study. There are a number of sources that show that positive educational services and school resources lead to positive and effective adults in society (Wyatt, 2009). Serpell et al. (2009) discussed that the issue of the

increasing number of African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs was a challenge in the educational sector because of political, social, and cultural divisions.

Summary

The findings of this study could be helpful for better recognition and support of African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs by exploring ways to reduce the number of referrals for these students. The increasing number of them in special education programs prompts educators to take an active role in helping them have better educational achievements.

A look at the relationship between African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs and their relationship with their educators along with the educators' perceptions could help reduce the disproportionate number of these students in special education. The results of the study were aligned with the basic conceptual framework of CRT, and to a lesser extent, ZPD, as discussed previously.

Section 2 of this study, the literature review, investigates African American students' participation and subsequent performance in special education, as well as the relationship between African American students, 9th -12th grade and educators. It explains how ZPD and CRT ideas can support the changes needed to better support African American students. Section 3 describes the research methodology used, along with the instrumentation, participants, and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. Section 4 presents the data analysis. In section 5 there is a discussion of the results, recommendations, conclusions, and areas for further research.

Section 2: Review of the Pertinent Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore educators' perceptions about African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were referred for special education services. The relationship between African American students, 9th -12th grade, and educators was also explored. The research was obtained from a variety of scholarly journals in various databases to effectively examine this relationship.

The following databases were used: Academic Search Premier, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), and Primary Search. During the search, a variety of keywords were used: *African American students, critical race theory, differentiated instruction, zone of proximal development, special education, overrepresentation in special education classes, counseling and referral services, school counselor duties, administrator perception, and teacher perception*. Although majority of the data derived in the searches was collected in the last 5 years, some information was not as recent as it helps explain the development of the problem.

In the review of the pertinent literature research on zone of proximal development, differentiated instruction, critical race theory along with the background and application was discussed. The review continued with research supporting African American students and special education along with the role of the educator as it related to the study. Furthermore, it expanded on interactions with students with educational disabilities, collaboration with parents, and early intervention activities. It concludes with a case study review and an explanation of different methodologies related to the research.

Zone of Proximal Development

ZPD is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (Corsaro, 2011). Vygotsky's theory was based on the assumption that a student's ability to complete a task, if given enough assistance, can be successful (Silver, 2011). This is important for this study because once it is known what level African American students can work independently on, we can focus on getting accurate help from effective support team members to create growth in their learning. ZPD is the gap between what he has mastered and what he or she can achieve with educational support. Berger (2009) noted teachers, parents, and mentors attuned to a learner can recognize where he or she is within the ZPD by asking questions and by recognizing the learner's individual learning style.

There were a few aspects of ZPD that have been emphasized. The assistance assumption was referenced as it relates to educators and their communication with students. Zone of proximal development assumed that learning was dependent on interventions by a more competent person which may have been presented as the defining characteristic. Corsaro (2011) argued that the notion of the ZPD was a little more meaningful than that of a learning situation presented to a child, where adults and/ or more advanced children directly or indirectly have a positive influence on the child.

ZPD relates to a cultural- historical theory that is an important key due to the fact that children's development is structured by culture and experience. Information comes not only from the child's environment but from the beliefs and values of the adults

around them. This information is significant to educators for understanding how certain

beliefs and behaviors effect and impact students. ZPD was a concept developed as an

argument against the use of standardized test to gauge the intelligence level of a student.

Looking at what a student can do in the future was one of the purposes of an educator.

McAuliffe and Ericksen (2011) asserted that educators who possess a high degree of

cognitive complexity investigate a broader range of opportunities and confront situations

with greater confidence and skill. When educators can look beyond stereotypes and place

students in the correct educational settings, students would achieve through quality

instruction.

Differentiated Instruction

Bigio (2010) described differentiation as the intrinsic right of all students to

acquire high quality instruction in a way that is precisely scheduled and tailored to fit

students' individual challenges. In differentiated instruction, students are put in the

center of the educational and assimilation processes (Bigio, 2010). According to

McLeskey and Waldron (2011), measures of differentiated instruction include the

following aspects: striving towards the placement of the capacities of students in

accordance with appropriate resources; entailing an incorporation of whole class and one-

on-one instruction; making use of a plurality of teaching regimes for facilitating input,

information handling and output; and, progressively conforming to the context-oriented

needs of students based on serial assessments of school personnel or the teacher in

relation to all learners. Thus the essential idea of differentiated instruction involves a

basic requirement for educators to modify and organize their programs to suit the

contextual or individual challenges faced by educationally challenged students that

translate into unique personal demands, rather than expecting students to modify and adhere to the conventional educational regime (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

Bigio (2010) also noted that on the part of educators, differentiated instruction requires educators to have appropriate and viable knowledge of the student they are servicing. Doing so would enable all students to find and perceive value individually in the educational experience, regardless of their respective socio-cultural condition. In other words, according to Dean, Hubbell, Pitler and Stone (2012), differentiated instruction is not the gradual, day-to-day school education for students to meet up with the flow of instruction, sometimes the expectation for students to have superior performances in comparison to other school peers and regarding it as differentiation on the basis of results.

When it comes to differentiated instruction, Bigio (2010) emphasized caution with regards to comprehending the construct of differentiation in lieu of telling students what to do. That is to say, differentiated instruction does not humiliate the learners who are slow to assimilate by accentuating their shortcomings or learning disabilities but rather ensure that these slow learners were instructed at their own pace and guided accordingly. McLeskey and Waldron (2011) stated that the most viable approach to differentiated education was by focusing efforts on a reinforced, student-centered, rational regime and perspective towards schooling. According to Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, and Saunders, (2009), the philosophically oriented and philosophically based approach related to school education and reinforced three pivotal features of differentiated school education known as self-interest, preparedness and learning approaches.

Cosaro (2011) made reference to Lev Vygotsky and his demonstration that an individual acquires or assimilates instruction more efficiently parallel to his desire and preparedness to be taught. Schmoker (2011) indicated this sort of contribution forms a viable foundation for differentiated instruction. Berkeley et al. (2009) discussed that differentiated school education brings in constructivist learning concepts, learning disposition, and psychological development research on factors that influence student preparedness, concentration and intelligence modes in line with enthusiasm, dedication, and learning development of the students inside the school.

Levy (2008) made the statement that through the employment of differentiated schooling, teachers and school counselors were capable of fulfilling all the individual demands and challenges of respective students and also progress further than conventional stipulations. Knowles (2009) added to Levy's ideas by noting that the apparent need for differentiated instruction was inherent within the premise that there was a wide disparity among students, with this disparity based upon numerous features and school populations. On a similar note, differentiated instruction utilized various instructional facilities and measures so as to fulfill the personal demand and disabilities of each student in a specific classroom (Marzano, 2007). This ensured that a parallel regime of academic opportunity was offered to all learners in the classroom.

Critical Race Theory: Background and Application

The notion of racism can be defined as the belief that characteristics and abilities can be attributed to people simply on the basis of their race, and that some racial groups are superior to others (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Scholars created CRT, which essentially examines the transformative relationships of race, racism, and power (Delgado, 2009).

Zamudio, Russell, Bridgeman, and Rios (2010) discerned that the theory seeks to expound on the human race's position to act in a way they deem as appropriate in the face of their immediate environment. According to Woodland (2008), CRT is considered to be a reliable tool in the assessment of the extent to which African American students are affected by discrimination along racial lines in matters pertaining to enrollment in special education.

Delgado (2009) explained that CRT is vital in addressing the existence of social inequalities within society as well as explaining various ways in which racism and other related race issues operates in society. One major drawback of the theory stems from the fact that it is uncommon and unknown by the majority of American citizens. However, scholars are on the forefront in countering the issue by ensuring that their work is documented fairly in order to fit into the different cultural societies (Clark, 2008; Gresson, 2008). Because of this, CRT investigated matters that pertain to race and racism, ethnicity, and class as sources of power in the community, which then helped predict as well as solve any form of conflict that may have risen from the existing diverse cultures and beliefs (Ladson-Billing, 2009).

The sluggish pace at which the Civil Rights Movement was enacted helped along the emergence of CRT in the first part of the 1970s. Scholars, lawyers, and other intellectual activists established this theory in part as a result of increasing concern. Roberts (2010) noted that among the pioneer scholars applauded for their efforts in the development of CRT are Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. As a result, the first conference to find solutions to race issues was organized in Madison, Wisconsin in 1989. This movement by scholars initiated the exposure of some of the inconsistencies that

were conspicuous in legal policies. Some inconsistencies included educational policies and legal issues in the justice system (Delgado, 2009).

CRT provides a means through which humanity could appreciate how various educational structures such as knowledge, objectivity, and truth could be used to pull together the boundaries that exist between White society and racism. Gresson (2008) showed that Kimberle Crenshaw is another outstanding scholar in the development of CRT. Kimberle Crenshaw pointed out both the expansive as well as the restrictive aspects in anti-discriminatory law. The expansive aspect focuses on major decisions that are laid out by the court in the quest of eliminating the visible effects of race and racism among people of color, whereas the restrictive aspect gives value to equality, thereby focusing on the future measures of curbing discriminations of any kind.

Clark (2008) argues that the voices and stories of people of color come from the different experiences and backgrounds of different groups of people, to which there is a need to listen. Despite the fact that the voices are different from Whites (who are the dominant culture in American society), there is a need to give them an opportunity to express themselves, due to the semantics that exists between African Americans and European Americans. This is one of the primary justifications for the existence of CRT.

Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, and Kern (2009) argue that the process of enactment and assessment of African American students referred to special education is not fair. This due to what Woodland (2008) considered a disproportionate placement of African American students who failed to fall within the expected and desirable percentage of enrollment in regular programs. According to Pitre (2009), enrollment in some special education programs echoed the reasons for the poor relationship that exist between

African American students in special education and educators. For example, approximately 27% of African American students were products of special education programs (Kunjufu, 2011), a finding that dovetailed with the arguments made by critical race theorists on the topic. Thus it can be argued that some special education programs failed to fulfill the main purpose for which they were intended (Kunjufu, 2011), which made the current research use of CRT logical.

It had been noted by critical race theorists that the overrepresentation of African American students and minority groups in special education programs are due in part to biased assessments and misrepresentation of Black cultural and social factors (Bryan & Gallant, 2012). Most educational facilitators, such as administrators, teachers, and school counselors, do not understand the cultural and social differences of African American students, and therefore view these differences as lack of adequacy, defiance, or a disability on the part of African American students (Woodland, 2008). The overrepresentation of African American students in special education classes continues to raise concern in the educational community. It is astounding that no solution has been reached even though according to Washington (2010) information was received concerning how educators in special education programs can aid in reducing this important matter.

African American Students and Special Education

Educators were brought into the foreground based on the aforementioned disproportionate placement of African American students in special education programs, which made it appear to be imperative for educators to provide guidance to these students. Anderson and Saddler (2009) noted special education students often have

disabilities and challenges such as mental retardation, learning impediments, behavioral dysfunctions, physical disabilities, audio and visual defects and speech defects. However, being African American does not, by definition, mean one will have these problems. Therefore, educators must include the knowledge of how to handle low self-esteem issues among African American students as well (Ross-Hill, 2009).

A majority of the increasing number of African American students in special education programs is considerably close to the general student population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), about 15% of African Americans within the age bracket of 3 - 21 have received educational services under the IDEA legislation previously mentioned. Howlin (2009) asserted there were many arguments as to the actual reason for the overrepresentation of African American students in special education programs, especially with respect to the male demographic.

The data for demographic distribution revealed that more than one third of students in most schools are students of color. Nevertheless, U.S. teaching personnel and school counselors were largely European female, and from the middle class (Kunjufu, 2011). According to Serpell et al. (2009), in order to increase the complexity of this issue, it should be recognized that many European American teachers and school counselors are from neighborhoods populated predominately of European Americans. They were also schooled in institutions with the same demographics in student body as well as the faculty. Additionally, the larger proportion of teacher instruction regimes fails to sufficiently handle the racial and socio-cultural disequilibrium between African American students and European American instructors.

According to Delgado (2009), the manner in which people in society consider or

perceive African American students has a direct impact or effect on the manner in which the same people react to them. Delgado (2009) utilized the tenants of CRT to note that a large proportion of the narratives in the available literature concerning African American students portray these young adults as being ED, drug addicted, unintelligent, criminals who are incarcerated and when placed back into society are still institutionalized. With such a biased perception of African American students, it is easier for society including administrators, teachers and school counselors specifically, to live in denial of the intelligent and creative capabilities and features of African American students and thus refuse to categorize them as good learners or good students (Kunjufu, 2011). We are still left with the question of what role educators play when working with an educationally challenged African American student.

<div align="center">**Role of the Educator**</div>

To understand the traditional roles of the educator, it became imperative to recognize the historical issues concerning the difficulty faced by educators in the description and definition of their professional roles as school administrators, teachers, and school counselors in general. It can be seen that through the 1960s and 1970s there have been various research studies carried out for the purpose of providing a clear-cut definition of the role of the educator as a mixture of consultant and helper (Houlston & Smith, 2009).

There have been some considerable and longstanding debates about the responsibilities of educators. Bryant and Baldwin (2010) noted that other roles, such as administrative duties, scheduling, and even hall monitoring, have also been found to be

widespread additional responsibilities of all educators. The head of school administration frequently dictates the role of teachers and school counselors.

There has been some considerable support of this point from various studies, such as those done by Bryant and Baldwin (2010). Their work found that the numerous roles taken on by educators detract from their ability to assist students in achieving academic proficiency. Educators are overloaded in terms of their multiple roles, therefore, handling of individual and social challenges faced by these young students are usually overlooked and/or forgotten. This was usually the reason for the students' low academic performances and they would eventually drop out of school. Also according to Bryant and Baldwin (2010), educators would be required to take leadership in the multidisciplinary team, organize the input coming from numerous disciplines, provide pertinent information to guardians and parents of students, and foster collaboration between the educational team and the parents/guardians of students, therefore, it can be seen that one of the most important roles of educators was that of developing effective ways to collaborate in order to ensure greater reliability and transparency in resolving the main problems associated with the overrepresentation of African American students in special education.

Bryant and Baldwin (2010) also discussed over the course of time, casual factors behind academic failure that encompass various academic challenges as a result of educational disabilities, specifically based on the increased population of students with educational disabilities that have been put into the mainstream educational setting because of the educational inclusion movement. It was on this basis of knowledge that carried out an assessment of the issues regarding special education and made a significant

prediction that there would be a major impact from the inclusion movement on education. Griffin and Steen (2011) stated that educators would have a need for emerging data, training, and insight concerning some divergent opinions and topical issues. Ross-Hill (2009) concurred on the aforementioned predictions and highlighted some impedance that was faced by educators with respect to the growth of the inclusion movement. The list of challenges include academic and developmental data, to increase the development of their own professional image, and to ensure mentally healthy academic settings by functioning as advocate, consultant, humanitarian, and trainer. Educators needed to demonstrate their important role as leaders in the sense that their presence is fundamental for motivating students for more enhanced educational development (Roberts, 2010).

Interactions with Students with Educational Disabilities

Currently, educationally challenged students have an entitlement obligated by government legislation to a cost-free and sufficient public education. This obligation was enshrined within the previously discussed legislative package known as IDEA. With this service students were made eligible for services as defined within various federal legislation statutes, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA of 1990, and the IDEA of 1975, which was updated in 2004. Irrespective of the fact that these pieces of legislation focused on education for students with educational challenges, in a lot of instances, misconception and misrepresentation of these aforementioned provisions have led to the outcome of services becoming irregular, improper, and expensive. Problems with services usually result in students being misdiagnosed or marked as not falling within the borders of eligibility for special services. The importance concerning the inherent rights of students with educational challenges were the duties of choosing or

identifying which students have educational challenges, diagnosing the kind of educational challenge, and determining the particular federal legislation that concerns or relates to the situation of each child.

Bryan and Gallant (2012) explained that educators who are not familiar with students with educational challenges may have some hesitation in participating in educationally connected tasks like student-tailored academic plans. A review of available literature revealed that some research efforts have demonstrated that a lot of educators feel insufficiently prepared for meeting the demands of all student demographics. Beacham and Rouse (2012) found that the negligent attitudes of staff usually arise out of an absence of sufficient training concerning disabled students. Nevertheless, educators' academic initiatives have no requirements for students who have educational disabilities.

Student Achievement

According to Washington (2010), the educational gap between African American students and their European American counterparts was estimated to have increased over the last decade, despite the federal legislation that had been enacted primarily to overcome educational gaps. The achievement gap continued to be a major educational issue in the United States. For example, Bryan and Gallant (2012) reported that by the end of 12th grade, the educational performance of African American students in reading and mathematics would be equal to performance of their 8th grade European American counterparts.

Serpell et al. (2009) discussed special education programs were enacted into law in the year 1975 with aim of helping individuals with educational disabilities. One such law, the Education for all Handicapped Children's Act (EHA), required that an

assessment of special education be conducted for all persons, regardless of educational achievement or race, who could not benefit from normal educational systems (Serpell et al., 2009). Kunjufu (2011) pointed out how the program instead was misused by school authorities to inappropriately place a higher percentage of African American students that were assumed to not meet educational requirements into special education classes. This has created an overrepresentation of African American students in special education classes

Woodland (2008) indicated that most African American students were secluded from receiving standard and quality education services as compared to European American students. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) reported that of all students enrolled in public schools; only 9% of African American students were represented, of 20% whom were enrolled in the developmentally delayed category. According to Clark (2008), African American students were assumed to have the inability to learn and were classified as ED at rates of 14% and 23%, respectively.

According to Kunjufu (2011), over the past number of years, studies have revealed a notably higher percentage of overrepresentation of African American students in special education classrooms for classifications of visually impaired, mentally unstable, learning inability, and physically challenged or impaired. This increase could be contributed to many factors such as test bias, medical conditions, and difficult life experiences. Serpell et al. (2009) showed that the identification of African American students for special education occurred at quite disproportionate rates, especially in urban school settings.

In a critique of the assessment process that was used in determining teacher and school counseling referrals, Washington (2010) observed that the process was insensitive to African American students who had internalized problems and required special education programs. These test programs often focused on the cultural understanding of the majority who happened to be European American students, and therefore were biased against African American students by definition (Serpell et al., 2009). Serving as the basis for cognitive ability, psychometric intelligence tests were the preponderant diagnostic tool for assessing childhood intelligence, and African Americans were substantially lower opposed to the performance of European Americans. For this reason, educators advised that the IQ tests that determined enrollment in special education needed to be revised. Since then, not much has been done, and the number of African Americans in special education continues to increase.

Effects of Special Education

The placement of African American students in special education programs has a lifelong adverse effect on students (Clark, 2008). Placement of African American students in special education programs limits them for job opportunities, as they often are unprepared to face future employment qualifications and responsibilities. Clark (2008) argued that special education also developed negative attitudes towards special education programs on the part of students. According to Kunjufu (2011), students exposed to programs were affected emotionally, which changed their perception concerning self-worth, self-confidence and the attainment of future goals.

Kunjufu (2011) observed that the placement of African American students in special education programs accelerated the rate of high school dropouts. Furthermore, as

reported by Clark (2008), research indicated that 80% of African American school dropouts were in prisons which increased the rate of them being disqualified in the job market. This effectively meant that career opportunities for African American students were threatened by placement in special education programs, and as Kunjufu (2011) detailed, the rate at which "disabled" students were employed would be lower than the rate of employment for students enrolled in normal educational programs. Stevenson (2008) explained that the rate of employment of these students from special education programs were 61% as compared to their European American counterparts, which were 89%. While these students are in special education programs, they miss essential general education academic and social curricula. Serpell et al. (2009), explained this limited exposure to the core academic curriculum continues the spiral of, lower levels of achievement, decreased likelihood of post-secondary education, and more limited employment.

Collaboration with Educators and Parents

Griffin and Steen (2011) had suggested that educators needed to change their attitude towards African American parents and focus on initiating programs that would be helpful to students. Before any systematic change was to be made in the lives of students, educators were first expected to change their attitude towards African American parents. This change in attitude meant that educators should take considerable time to understand the roles that African American parents play in the lives of their children.

Bryan and Gallant (2012) noted that administrators, teachers, and school counselors had a negative perspective concerning African American students. They suggested that a positive relationship between African American students and educators

could only be accomplished by ensuring that a mutual understanding exists between the two parties. Both educators and parents of children with special needs realized that identifying a student as disabled was challenging and had lifelong implications.

Griffin and Steen (2011) also noted that African American parents had a lack of trust in the education systems to which their children were exposed. It has been observed that there was a lack of proper communication between educators and African American parents. If educators involved the parents in the daily activities and progress of their children it could possibly break down this mistrust. If this was done immediately when African American students were enrolled in school the attitude and behavior of them could be monitored from the start. This suggestion established several solutions, such as initiating a positive approach to problems even before they arise. This allows both educators and parents to have an understanding of each other's goals and expectations, thus creating awareness for students on the mutual relationships that exist between their parents and educators. It also allows a rapport to be established between educators and African American parents.

Community Collaboration

Educators could take responsibility of becoming familiar with the community, its resources and advocating for African American parents and their students. For example, Washington (2010) noted that administrators, teachers, school counselors, and community leaders together could produce programs that would continue to enhance learning even outside of school. They can organize after school and extended school activities that could provide African American students with additional academic benefits even after they complete their schoolwork. This kind of collaboration could ensure that

African American students have someone to take care of them while both at school and out of school.

According to Washington (2010) such an interaction between the community, administrators, teachers, school counselors, and parents of African American students would increase communication among the participants, which in turn would lead to productive relationships. This would also give students the confidence to act reasonably according to what society and the school environment expects of them. Engaging students in constructive activities while out of school would allow them to utilize idol time to their full advantage. It has been indicated that such a move also reduces the rate of hostility and drug intake among African American students. McCray, Grant, and Beachum (2010) observed that although collaboration between the community, administrators, teachers, and school counselors reduces the rate of hostility among African American students, the reality was that changing the attitude of students was the only possible way of cutting down the rate at which students were being enrolled in special education programs.

Another community resource in which educators and community leaders can get African American students engaged in was the church community. The African American church community was a vital instrument in African American society that has been used to enrich the lives of their students socially, emotionally, and spiritually. McCray et al. (2010) further suggested that church activities have a great impact in the lives of African American students. They explained that it was the only sure way in which the relationship between educators and African American students can be enriched directly. Additionally, they recommended that educators should work in conjunction

with church ministers in ensuring that group oriented projects and developments are supported and promoted among African American students.

Early Intervention Activities

Stevenson (2008) articulated in his research that educators were now in a better position to address the needs of African American students because they have the ability to carry out early intervention activities. He explained that such activities by educators could be used to reduce the rate at which African American students are enrolled in special education. Along these same lines, Washington (2010) identified some of the pre-referral early intervention services to be addressed, such as a student's historical background, social issues, cultural issues, as well as a student's weaknesses and strengths. More specifically, he noted that some early intervention activities included counseling services in the school curriculum for African American students, encouraging a positive behavior among students, and finally, initiating behavioral changes among African American students who displayed hostile or rude behaviors towards their teachers and school administration.

Other early intervention activities by educators included organizing multi-cultural activities for students while they were in the classroom, as to build up an environment that was conducive to students of color. It was indicated by Kunjufu (2011) that such a move improves self-esteem of African American students, and that they would eventually learn to accept other people's ideas and make relevant decisions when solving problems.

Additionally, Washington (2010) noted that educators could engage students in individual counseling or in small discussion groups that would students who have anger management problems or socializing problems. Apart from the above-mentioned

activities and services, Washington (2010) also indicated that educators could use various techniques, such as carrying out relaxation and breathing exercises, guided imagery, play therapy, social training techniques, and role-playing, as early intervention techniques to improve conditions in which students were exposed to.

Case Study Review

For this study, I chose to use the case study because it was important to observe, in a natural setting, educators and their interactions with African American students who were being referred to special education programs. Creswell (2013) explained that a case study involves the study of an explained issue through one or more cases within a bounded system. Others presented a case study as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013).

According to Stake (2006), instrumental, intrinsic, and collective are three different purposes of a case study. The instrumental case study is done to provide a general understanding of a phenomenon using a particular case. The intrinsic case study is done to learn about a unique phenomenon in which the study focuses. The collective case study is done to provide a general understanding using a number of instrumental case studies that either occur on the same site or come from multiple sites. A quantitative study was not best for this research because the statistics were not the only source to take into account. Looking at the research questions there was a need to look at the connection between educators and African American students.

For this particular case study, I conducted a single instrumental case study. I sought a general understanding of a phenomenon at a New Jersey high school. This phenomenon was the perception educators had about African American students and referring them to receive special education services.

Different Methodologies

With respect to qualitative work in the area of CRT, previous research has relied on the case study as the preferred method of investigation (Parker, 2008). According to Bonilla-Silva (2009), CRT was a movement that was set up by scholars who took into their interest of study and changed the relationship that existed among individuals of different races. Parker (2008) echoed the thoughts of Bonilla-Silva by indicating that CRT helped to address preconceived notions by educators concerning the behavior and performance of African American students. It explained that such negative notions always resulted in poor performance among African American students especially those in high school. Parker (2008) also noted that the case study was an optimal method to determine this information when investigating CRT.

According to Beacham and Rouse (2012), although qualitative methods can be used to study issues related to CRT, a quantitative approach has been used in the past to investigate the experience of African American students from a CRT perspective. Quantitative studies do not allow a researcher the opportunity to "drill down" into the lived experiences of the research participants the way a qualitative approach allows. One of the best ways to "drill down" into the lived experiences of research participants was through a case study, because as explained by Creswell (2013), a case study allows a researcher to explore a research system within its totality.

Qualitative research tends to inquire and make sense of both experiences and phenomena while at the same time developing interpretations of specific topics. The investigation took place at a New Jersey high school. This location was chosen because it was hoped that research conducted there helped educators limit the number of referrals to special education programs. It was also hoped that this investigation helped to better understand the perceptions teachers, school counselors, and administrators had about African American students, 9th -12th grade. In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative case study was conducted at the New Jersey high school.

Summary

In the course of trying to find the most appropriate solution to this problem of the disproportionate number of African American students in special education, there was a need first to prepare educators to tackle the various needs of all students, irrespective of their cultural background. There was also a need to work on improving educators' abilities to provide culture and positive ethnic responsive services to these students so that they can improve their performance in schools. This literature review discussed the conceptual framework for this study. It first used ZPD as a theory and connected it to the importance of differentiated instruction. It also made a connection with CRT and how this theory was important for African American students in special education programs. It also looked at the role of the educator and community collaboration. This review of the literature discussed early intervention activities that educators can use to limit referrals to special education. Lastly, a case study review was done along with the different methodologies related to the research.

In Section 3, the methodology will be discussed, including the research design, research questions, context for the study, measures for ethical protection, role of the researcher, criteria for participation, data collection, data analysis, and research validity. Based on the research from the review of literature the following section will discuss the exact methods of the study.

Section 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore educators' perceptions about African American students, 9-12th grade, who were referred for special education services. This section of the study outlines the case study methodology used in this investigation. This section also includes the research design, research questions, and the context of the study. It addresses measures for ethical protection, role of the researcher, criteria for participation, data collection technique, and validity issues of the study.

Research Design

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), a case study is an intensive analysis of an individual unit that stresses developmental factors in relation to context. This unit focused on African American students and the referral process of special education. Generally speaking, case studies typically are either descriptive or explanatory. This case study was an explanatory. Thomas (2011) offered the following definition of a case study: A case study provides a way to look at events, information, and show results. This case study showed information and results. This can be done through people, policies, institutions, or another system that is being studied. The research design for this study was a qualitative case study of educators' perceptions about African American students, 9-12th grade. This case study was used to receive information on how to prevent referrals to special education programs. An observation by Creswell (2013) was that a case study is appropriate when a researcher wishes to explore a program, event, activity or process thoroughly. This study explored a program and process thoroughly. Merriam (2011) defined a case study as a study of a particular program, person,

phenomenon, or anything else that has specific boundaries. This case study was a particular program with specific boundaries. A qualitative case study was used to understand a general phenomenon by studying a particular case which was the basis for this case study at a New Jersey high school.

A qualitative case study was chosen as the research technique because it was the best method available to document the process and interactions educators have with African American students in special education programs. Because this study analyzed only one case, neither a multiple case study design nor a collective case study was used (Stake, 2006).

A narrative study was not best, because an individual experience was not being studied. Although similar to a single instrumental case study and favored for this type of study, a phenomenological study was not the optimal technique because the goal was not to understand the experiences, understandings, and/or thoughts of the participants under investigation. Also pure phenomenology research essentially is used to describe rather than explain the essence of the research. In this case study method it was important that educators' perceptions were explained to help provide solutions to the research problem. Lastly, ethnography was considered for this research study. The central aim of ethnography is to provide holistic insights into people's views and actions through interviews and observations. Observation was not being used for research, which would be used to capture the core of the study. The case study method was chosen because a particular service was the aim of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated by the study:

Research Question 1: What was general education teachers' perceptions concerning the process of referring African American students to special education?

Research Question 2: What was school counselors' perceptions concerning the process of referring African American students to special education?

Research Question 3: What was school administrators' perceptions concerning the process of referring African American students to special education?

Context of the Study

The research took place at a New Jersey high school. According to the Public School Review (2011), the high school had a total population of 1,011 students, 50% of whom were male, and 50% of whom were female. The total number of classroom teachers was 86, with a teacher student ratio of 1:12. The demographic makeup of the school was 2% European American, 56% African American, 41% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. All forms of data collection took place at the high school during normal school hours.

Measures for Ethical Protection

The researcher needed to ensure that the privacy, rights, and confidentiality of all respondents and individuals who participated in the research study were assured. Based on those important obligations, I first had to obtain permission from the administration of the selected New Jersey high school to access the educators who were used as participants for the study. I set up an appointment at the school and the educators were invited to participate in the interview and they were assured that it was confidential. At the time of invitation I answered any questions the educators had regarding the study.

Permission to access the setting was sought by personally presenting the consent form to the principal and each educator participating in the study. The procedure to be followed was also explained. All parties were informed that confidentiality of identity and information was assured. I used typology in an effort to keep all information confidential. After all interviews (see Appendix B for interview questions) were transcribed I used the topical analysis program, NVivo10. I kept all of the originals that were used for the research study. The originals were kept in a safe and secure place and are stored and will be destroyed after 5 years as per Walden University policy.

Through the use of a consent form (see Appendix C), I was able to ensure that all candidates make a voluntary and informed decision to participate in the research. The introduction letter given to each candidate (see Appendix C) promised that the confidentiality of the data would be upheld throughout the research. The letter informed candidates that the name of the school would be kept anonymous at all times, and codes were used to represent the six candidates who were used in the study.

The specific procedure to be followed required initial submission of an Application to Conduct Research and a written proposal. This document was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Walden University and (approved # 03-27-14-0057706). Copies of the application were sent to the Office of Assessment, Equity, and Record Services for review prior to any data collection. Once approvals were given, interviews were set up and completed. The data analysis and interpretation, as well as presentation of results, took place after all data collection work was completed.

Role of Researcher

I held several roles in this qualitative case study: interviewer, data collector, analyzer, evaluator, interpreter, and reporter. As an assistant principal at another high school, there was no superiority or positional authority over the participants at this New Jersey high school on my part. Due to my role in the education profession, member checks were done to ensure the consent of the participants, reaffirming the confidentiality of identity. This was also done to mitigate any potential bias on my part. Being an administrator responsible for the discipline of my school, I am sharing the information pertaining to this study in hopes for a positive impact in schools and on learning.

Criteria for Participation

Criteria sampling was selected in this case study, choosing educators who serviced African American students. Volunteers were requested for this case study and the participants were then narrowed down to two general education teachers, two school counselors, and two administrators. This particular sampling was important because the educators met the required criteria. The participants in this study were six educators at the New Jersey high school selected. One interview was conducted with each educator (or six interviews total), with each interview lasting approximately 20 minutes.

Data Collection

Data was collected over a period of approximately two weeks from two primary sources. The first form of data collected were documents from the school, which was the responsibility of each school counselor, teacher, and administrator (Appendix A). The second form of data collected were a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with each of the educators at selected high school. The questions asked of the participants

focused on their relationships with their students and the services they have provided to students.

Educators' interviews pertained to ten questions about the services educators provided to students and were held in a private office with the blinds closed to assure privacy. The interviews were vital, because they gave the educators the opportunity to share their own thoughts. This experience helped to capture the essence of the study. The interviews took place over a 2 day period. Three interviews were conducted per day, as there were six educators from the New Jersey high school. Field notes were taken from audio recordings and field notes were taken during the interviews to make sure that information was accurate (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The field notes allowed me to verify the information that I transcribed was accurate and documented verbatim from the participants. The interviews took approximately 20 minutes each. The questions for the interviews are located in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this doctoral study was to understand educators' perceptions about referring African American students to special education programs. Documents and interviews were the primary methods used to collect data. A topical analysis was used to organize topics according to the opinions of teachers, school counselors, and administrators concerning their perceptions about the referral process of African American students into special education. The computer program NVivo10 was utilized to keep track of data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), it is important to have several forms of data when conducting research because it gives strong validity to research. Interviews were part of the data collection process; therefore, all interviews

were transcribed. As stated by Rubin and Rubin (2005), a researcher first should prepare interview transcripts, and then find, refine, and elaborate the concepts, themes, and events within the transcripts. Afterwards, the researcher should, "compare concepts and themes across the interviews" (p. 201). The following topical names were assigned within the study: General education teachers, school counselors, and administrators.

According to Yin (2003), in a case study data collection context, any patterns found within transcribed data may be related. Yin (2003) also stated that pattern matching compares patterns that have been established with a predicted (or predictable) configuration. I examined the transcribed interviews from the audio recordings and looked for patterns from the specific set of data. Finally, I compared all data points to evaluate if an overall pattern existed. The goal was to see if the various patterns in the data matched. As pattern matching occurred, I then used the matched patterns to answer the original research questions. It should be noted here that pattern matching also strengthens the argument for the internal validity of the case study. I also kept a reflective journal as part of the process, which was helpful for recommendations.

Research Validity

Two strategies were used to ensure validity in the research study. Roberts (2004) defined validity as, "the degree to which your instrument truly measures what it purports to measure" (p. 136). Documents and interviews were used as part of the data collection so that data points for the same phenomena under observation could be obtained. Pattern matching of separate data points could be observed, and then the argument for the internal validity of the data could be made.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), member checking is a frequently used approach in which the investigator takes summaries of the findings back to the key participants in the study and asks them whether the findings are an accurate reflection of their experiences. This was the second strategy that I used to ensure the validity of the data.

Summary

The use of data gathered from various studies on special education was essential for a study of educators' perceptions concerning African American students being referred into special education programs. By using this information, educators can identify important trends and patterns in social justice issues related to special education programs for African American students. Overall, the methodology section was used to provide details related to the methodology chosen for this qualitative research study. The findings are presented in Section 4.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore educators' perceptions about African American students, 9th-12th grade, who were referred for special education services. The study was completed at a New Jersey high school. The research questions asked how the general education teachers, school counselors, and administrators perceived the process of referring African American students to special education. The findings are presented in a way that logically explains the research questions. This section begins with a presentation of data, followed by an overview of the data analysis and tracking; it discusses the, patterns, relationships, and themes along with discrepant cases. A discussion of the evidence of quality concludes the section.

Presentation of Data

In this case study, six educators who provided services to African American students, 9-12th grade underwent semi-structured interviews: two general education teachers, two school counselors, and two administrators. The data from the interviews and job description documents were used to answer the three research questions. I was able to complete all of the interviews in 2 days. Each interview took about 20 minutes. The counselors were interviewed individually in a private office in the school guidance area. Then the two administrators were interviewed in a private area of the main office. The last two interviews were completed on the second day, in the same place, with the two general education teachers.

Data Analysis and Tracking

The data for this qualitative case study were collected from six educators, who were selected via purposeful sampling: two general education teachers, two school counselors, and two administrators. Before the interview, participants were given ten semi-structured interview questions so that they would be familiar with the questions and prepared to answer them. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The participants are identified in the transcripts as T1 and T2, for the general education teachers; S1 and S2, for the school counselors; A1 and A2, for the administrators. The transcriptions were compared two times to the audio recording to make sure they were accurate.

Some significant patterns emerged in the educators' responses. All educators felt that students tended to have unrealistic life goals, and that unrealistic goals held by students created issues with helping students to reach realistic goals. One educator did note that by the time students reach their junior and senior year in high school, their goals aligned more closely with reality. None of the respondents felt that there was either an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of minorities in special education classes, although one educator did comment that they found there were more boys than girls in special education classes. All six respondents reported that they made only a few student referrals to special education. The relatively few number of referrals were felt to be the results of the level of education and the fact that by the time students get to high school, students who were in need of special education programs have already been placed there. Finally, all of the respondents felt that special education was necessary for students who needed it, and that special education benefitted students in terms of obtaining desired educational outcomes.

The topics that emerged from the data were unrealistic life goals and a misrepresentation of special education.

Findings

The findings flow from the problem statement, which focused on educators' perceptions concerning African American students, 9-12th grade, and the referral process into special education programs. This qualitative case study was completed at a New Jersey high school. The findings are discussed by each theme that emerged from analysis of the data. It was important not to only discuss the themes but discuss the sub-themes and specific interview questions, which showed discrepant data.

Theme 1: Unrealistic Life Goals

The theme of unrealistic life goals was voiced by several participants about students they serviced. A realistic goal was something a student would be able to achieve within the parameters of their educational level. Having unrealistic life goals was stated several times in the interview. According to S1, some students are not realistic: "Some say they want to be basketball players and go to the NBA and I need them to think about a backup plan, so I ask them if the NBA doesn't work out how will you take care of yourself?" S2 anticipated students being unrealistic, so she had them develop two different plans: "Sometimes Plan A is something they dream of and Plan B is more realistic." While some of T1's students were unrealistic, others had "very real expectations." His/her aim was "to get them to see some options for themselves." The data revealed that educators discussed options with students.

Theme 2: Misrepresentation of Special Education

The next theme that emerged was that educators did not feel that there was an overrepresentation of any group of students in special education. This topic was highly reinforced with the administrators. Both administrators made it clear that they felt there was not an overrepresentation of any students in special education. A1 commented, "No I don't feel that any particular populations of students are overrepresented because in my years of experience I have seen it vary from school to school." A2 commented, "No I don't. We have a diverse population of students who receive special education services." In addition one teacher made it clear that there was not an overrepresentation of any population in special education. T1 commented, "Well I haven't referred any students for special education so I'm not exactly sure of the population but right off the top of my head…uh, I would have to say no." It was apparent that educators did not feel that any population of students were overrepresented in special education.

<div align="center">

Sub-Themes

</div>

General Education Teachers

The hypothesis was that most educators would respond stating that there was a disproportionate number or overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs as found by Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, and Kern (2009), but this was not the case. General education teachers said their role was to look at each student individually and see if there were things students needed help with. If a student needed help, then the general education teacher would refer the student to their school counselor. The teacher would also attempt to communicate with the parents/ guardians as well. Teachers said that their communication issues with students primarily revolved around the fact that

students had unrealistic expectations of the future. As T2 noted, their strategy was to "just talk to them about options and try to keep it simple."

One area of real concern for educators was the reading levels of students. All of the educators commented on the fact that making sure the students were on the appropriate reading level for their particular grade was a great way to ensure student success. This was a theme mentioned by all six respondents', therefore it stands to reason that some students are coming to high school incapable of reading at their assigned grade level in terms of both reading and comprehending the materials.

School Counselors

Like general education teachers, school counselors found that students tended to have unrealistic life goals and expectations. Unlike general education teachers, school counselors felt that it was the job of the counselor to work with students to find achievable goals. S1 noted, "Academics is just one piece of it, there is so much more. Part of it is just getting them here and making it enjoyable when they're here so that they want to come, this is what we have to build on." School counselors also felt that it was the job of the counselor to ensure correct placement, as they were gatekeepers for the special education program. In addition, school counselors also felt that they were the ones who would do the referring to the CST so as to ensure the process ran smoothly for students. Ultimately, school counselors felt that one of the ways to ensure success in school was to place everything in the hands of those trained for the area within the correct context.

Administrators

Some administrator's commented that their primary responsibilities were not as

involved as others with the actual students themselves. In other words, administrators felt that their role was to support teachers, school counselors, and CST. Administrators who were interviewed noted how they would talk to parents when necessary and help deal with disciplinary issues. Administrators rarely referred students into special education programs, although one administrator did comment that if they were made aware of a student with disciplinary issues, they would refer them to a counselor. Like the educators, administrators also commented that reading at level was of significant importance to educational success, and how important it was to ensure that the students were at the correct reading level in order to help in other areas of educational success as well.

As for the effectiveness of special education, some administrators had conflicting thoughts, as commented from A2, "Yes and no and let me explain. For some, the help is beneficial because they need the extra support and for others the placement could be wrong and their self-esteem becomes low and I have seen some kid's dropout of school because they didn't feel like they could accomplish anything.

Discrepant Cases

The data analysis also exposed some nonconforming data. The best way to show the results of the nonconforming data was through the specific interview questions. The following were the ten specific interview questions that were asked to the participants and the results.

Specific Interview Results

The following are the questions asked and a summation of the responses:

Q1. How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your

experience?

Respondent's answers ranged from a low of 3 years to a high of 38 years. Average time teaching among all six respondents was 14.3 years.

Q2. How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

The primary theme to emerge from this question was one of providing support for the students. For example, T2 stated, " I give all students support and make accommodations according to their needs," a comment that was echoed by T2, A2 and S1.

A secondary theme to emerge from the data was that it was important to meet the student where they are in terms of their skills and proper interactions. As S1 stated, "Part of it is just getting them here and making it enjoyable when they're here so that they want to come, this is what we have to build on."

Q3. Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

The resounding answer to this question was no. All six respondents stated that they did not feel like any particular population of students was underserved. A quote from S2 illustrated this point succinctly stating; "for the most part, I think all of our students are treated equally."

When asked why not, answers centered on the understanding that all students were treated equally and were given opportunities to succeed. As A1 stated, "I know now more than ever all kids have so many great opportunities."

Q4. Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

Five of the six respondents stated that they do not feel that a particular population of students are overrepresented in special education. Three of the respondents did not give a clear and concise answer to the question. For example, S2 stated, "I wouldn't say we have an overrepresentation but the numbers for some groups are a little higher than others." T2 also stated, "Although I don't teach special education I do know that the research shows that there are more minority students in special ed. but based on my school I would have to say yes and no because I see more boys in special ed. than girls but not one particular race of students. I hope that answers the question." S1 was the only one who admitted to noticing a difference by stating that they tended to see more Hispanic and African American students in special education classes.

Q5. What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

No clear consensus answer emerged from the data with respect to this question which is non-confirming data. Two of the six respondents (S1 and T1) did directly note how their students had plans which were 'unrealistic', and S2 noted that some of their students have "Plan A is something they dream of and Plan B is more realistic". All of the respondents did note how they do work with their students to formulate a plan that will help students once they leave high school.

Q6. What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

Three of the six respondents (S1, A1 and T1) noted how improvements to the reading program at their school would help to limit referrals to special education programs. The second theme to emerge from the data revolved around more involvement

in helping the student. For example, A2 noted that included "getting the parents involved on a day to day basis" would help, whereas T2 stated that "getting students the extra help they need" would be of assistance in limiting referrals.

Q7. What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

The only clear theme emerged from the data with respect to Question #7 is that all six respondents do believe that they have a distinct role in the process. With that being said, the role that a respondent plays does vary according to circumstances, the nature of the referral and the student involved. Two of the six respondents (S2 and T2) did note that they would seek to involve the Child Study Team as needed.

Q8. How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

The theme emerged from this question was that respondents tend to use the institutionalized means to refer students to special education. In other words, the respondents tend to use the rules in place at their schools to guide their decisions.

Q9. How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

Two of the respondents (A1 and T1) did not refer students to the Child Study Team. Two of the respondents (S2 and T2) replied that they do not refer students often. The remaining two respondents either use the Child Study Team "unless the parent disputes it" (S1) or on the advice of the counselor (A2).

Q10. Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

All six respondents stated that they thought students benefit from special education programs, although there were some caveats interjected into each response.

For example, S2 noted that special education would benefit students, but only "if they are placed correctly." T1 felt that it would work, "only if the student needs it." A2 was the lone dissenting voice. Although this respondent did agree that special education could work for some students, "for others the placement could be wrong and their self-esteem becomes low and I have seen some kid's dropout of school because they didn't feel like they could accomplish anything."

Evidence of Quality

In order to ensure the verification process, two methods were used. The two methods used were member checks and documents. The first validity measure used was member checking, which is a verification of the interview transcriptions. After the analysis was complete I gave copies of the transcriptions to the participants in the study. Each participant was asked to verify the accuracy of the interviews that were transcribed. All participants stated that the interviews were accurate. The second method used to measure the validity were documents obtained from the school. The documents helped to give a general understanding of each participant's job description as it related to the research questions and each educator's duties and responsibilities. Triangulation was also obtained from three sources that were general education teachers, school counselors, and administrators at the selected New Jersey high school. Evidence of quality was provided along with trustworthiness to help ensure validity in the qualitative case study (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

Included in this chapter was a discussion of the findings from data that was collected on educators' perceptions concerning African American student referrals into

special education programs. The data from educator interviews were transcribed,

documents were analyzed, and findings were presented. One finding in this qualitative

case study was that educators thought that students had unrealistic life goals. Another

finding that was important to mention was that educators did not feel that there was a

disproportionate number or overrepresentation of minority students in special education

programs. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings, and the conclusions, and

recommendations for further research.

Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' perceptions about African American students, 9th-12th grade, who were referred for special education services. This study was conducted because according to Kunjufu (2011), there were a disproportionate number of minority students in special education programs. Six educators participated in this study conducted at a New Jersey high school: two general education teachers, two school counselors, and two administrators. The study asked what the general education teachers', school counselors', and administrators' thoughts were about the process used to refer African American students to special education programs. It was discovered that these educators did not believe that African American students were being referred to special education programs at a rate that was significantly higher than normal. Nor did they perceive African American students as being overrepresented in special education programs. This section presents the conclusion of the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

According to the findings, participants felt that some students' life goals were not realistic or that they would not be able to accomplish certain goals because they could not read and comprehend well enough. Participants did not sense that there was an over- or underrepresentation of students in special education programs. These findings are addressed in the following paragraphs according to each of the study's three parallel research questions.

The first research question examined the perceptions of general education teachers about the practice of referring African American students to special education.

General education teachers felt that their job was to refer struggling students to the school counselor who then decided whether the referral would go to the CST. These teachers emphasized that referral decisions to special education programs considered whether the student was on the correct reading level. According to theorist Lev Vygotsky a more skilled teacher adjusts the amount of guidance to fit the child's potential level of performance (Silver, 2011). Educators could maximize the use of ZPD as a strategic tool to help African American students, 9th -12th grade, increase their reading levels.

The second research question addressed the perceptions of school counselors about the practice of referring African American students to special education. The school counselor interviews also made a point to state student reading levels, a statement that is supported by the literature. For example, Bryan and Gallant (2012) reported that by the end of 12th grade, the educational performance of African American students in reading and mathematics was equal to performance of their European American counterparts in 8th grade. School counselors who were interviewed perceived their role as identifying the problem of the student and sending the referral to the CST for review.

The third research question examined the perceptions of school administrators about the practice of referring African American students to special education. School administrators perceived their role as being a bit removed from the process. When it was necessary for a student to be referred to a special education program, school administrators felt that it was a task that should primarily be left to the school counselor. This only changed if a parent had concerns that were voiced directly to the administrator. Both educators and parents of children with special needs have realized that identifying a student as disabled is challenging and has lifelong implications. This challenge brings

educators into the foreground, Anderson and Saddler (2009) noted, especially since special education students often have disabilities and challenges such as mental retardation, learning impediments, behavioral dysfunctions, physical disabilities, audio and visual defects and speech defects. The literature continues to support reasons why some students are entering high school not on reading level.

Serpell et al. (2009) argued that the process of enactment and assessment of African American students who are referred to special education was not fair. For example, approximately 27% of African American students were products of special education programs (Kunjufu, 2011). According to the study, most educators were not accountable for African American students that were being placed in special education programs. Thus it could be argued that some special education programs failed to fulfill the main purpose for which they were intended which was to help students with learning disabilities (Kunjufu, 2011). This related directly to the research theory of CRT and educators needed to take notice and be responsible for all students. According to Woodland (2008), CRT was considered to be a reliable tool in the assessment of the extent to which African American students were affected by discrimination along racial lines in matters pertaining to enrollment in special education. The disproportionate number of African American students, 9-12th grade, in special education programs supported Woodland's statement.

Another theory that related to the framework was ZPD. Berger (2009) noted that if teachers, parents, and mentors attuned to a learner then they could recognize where he or she is within the ZPD development by asking questions and recognizing the learner's individual learning style. Looking at what a student can do in the future was one of the

purposes of an educator. When educators look beyond stereotypes and place students in the correct educational settings, students would be able to achieve through quality instruction. This would continue to show how ZPD can be used as a gap between what students has mastered and what they could achieve with educational support.

Based on the findings of this qualitative research study, educators needed to acknowledge how implementing quality-reading programs for all students would be beneficial as they enter high school. The research showed that educators felt that students had unrealistic life goals, looking deeper into the findings, reading and comprehension were important for students to reach their full potential. This would help move some students that are already placed into special education programs back into a regular educational setting. Stevenson (2008) articulated in his research, that educators at all levels are in a better position to address the needs of African American students by carrying out early intervention activities. By implementing early intervention activities, educators could help in reducing the rate at which African American students were referred into special education programs. This would be an effective approach because most educators felt that African American students were placed into special education programs before they reach the high school level.

Implications for Social Change

Important implications associated with this study were that the findings pointed out how educators should be made aware of the need to change their perceptions regarding African American students and the disproportionate number of these students in special education programs. This study may help African American students, 9th -12th grade, who were being referred to special education programs achieve success in school

and also obtain success in their adult lives by building positive relationships in schools. According to Kunjufu (2011), over the past number of years, studies have revealed a notably higher percentage of overrepresentation of African American students in special education classrooms. This increase could be contributed to many factors such as test bias, medical conditions, and difficult life experiences. The data suggested that educators who serviced African American students, 9-12th grade, did not feel that the referrals they made into special education programs impacted the disproportionate number of these students in these programs. On the basis of the findings, educators need to become more aware of the fact that African American students are overrepresented in special education programs. This limits opportunities for African American students in a significant number of ways. Serpell et al. (2009) showed the identification of African American students for special education occurs at quite disproportionate rates. Awareness of this fact may help educators build positive relationships with African American students who were placed in these programs, as well as increase the probability of assisting those who they may have considered referring to special education programs. Educator awareness could also promote self-esteem, positive decision- making, and decrease the dropout rate.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Action**</div>

As I began this study I thought about what I could do to address educators on the disproportionate number of African American students in special education programs. When approached by a colleague and co-worker of an affiliated organization, I became a mentor for a newly formed program that serviced African American, 9-12th grade, special education students. I was also responsible for recruiting other mentors and getting the students involved. This was a great opportunity for action.

I created a personal relationship with African American students, 9th-12th grade, who received special education services on a day-to-day basis and encouraged my colleagues to do the same. In addition, I asked all administrators in my building to work more closely with the CST to ensure the success of these students. Some of the changes made included administrators sitting in on meetings with special education students and their parents. In these meetings the discussion ranged from a student's Individualized Educational Plan to the students behavioral issues. This allowed administrators to be involved with the process.

The final step that I would take to get this information to educators, parents, and stakeholders was to attend the community board meetings to share the findings of the study. The findings would also be disseminated through the Parent Advisory Council meetings held throughout the local school district. The knowledge obtained from this study was important and dissemination would ensure the information from the study gets to a broad audience, which may allow change to take place.

Recommendations for Further Study

This qualitative case study has established a baseline for the topic of educators' perceptions on African American students and the referral process to special education. To gain more insight on this topic, future investigators could consider interviewing students, teachers, and parents. Another suggestion would be to complete an investigation on elementary or middle school children who are referred to special education programs to see if similar findings hold in younger populations. According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), about 15% of African Americans within the age bracket of 3 to 21 have received special education services.

Studying a younger sample would also most likely yield findings that could help to make changes before students reach high school.

Washington (2010) found that previous research efforts have demonstrated that some educators feel insufficiently prepared for meeting the demands of all student demographics in schools. This situation became more serious when considering the demands placed upon educators by the increasing number of students that must be assisted. Another recommendation would be to conduct a longitudinal study to examine whether perceptions change over time along with providing educators with sufficient training to meet the needs of all students. Beacham and Rouse (2012) found that the negligent attitudes of staff usually arise out of an absence of sufficient training concerning disabled students. This could be done with an administrator, and the actual application of changing the relationship between African American students and the administrator. The emphasis would be over time to see how time would affect the perceptions of the research participants.

Reflections of Experience

My experience through the research process allowed me to look at education differently. What I thought the outcome was going to be, and what the actual outcome of the study was, were very different things. I truly thought that educators were aware of the disproportionate number of African American students in special education programs. However, I was wrong. This study made it clear to me that some educators were so removed from the actual process of referring students into special education programs, that they were really unaware of how important it was to make a connection with these students and give them the support that they needed.

This qualitative research study was completed at a New Jersey high school, and as an administrator in the area, one of the biases I thought that I would encounter was that the participants would not be completely honest. While I was conducting my research, all participants appeared to be comfortable and honest as they answered all questions related to the study. My thinking about education has changed in the way of how I view my colleagues and their lack of knowledge regarding the topic. I realized that it was my responsibility as an educator to share information so that everyone was aware and that positive social change may take place.

Conclusions

In our society education was stressed to be of the upmost importance to our children. I examined the perceptions of educators and how they viewed the referral process of African American students into special education programs. Based on the results from the semi-structured interviews some educators were not aware of the effects of special education programs. Educators did not acknowledge that there was a serious problem. Based on the literature on African American students in high school, this study was needed for dissemination of information, encouragement, and mentoring services for these students.

Although the research shows that African American students were overrepresented in special education programs, it was evident that educators still did not understand that there are a disproportionate number of African American students in special education programs. Educators need to strive to maintain a balance in the student population for both regular education and special education by only referring students

when it is essential. This balance can only be done when educators take notice to the problem and make a conscious effort to make change.

There was an emerging theme in the data that showed that educators did not believe that there was a disproportionate number of minority students in special education programs or that they were being referred into special education at an alarming rate higher than others (Kunjufu, 2011). Understanding the need to reduce the number of African American students in special education programs was important to me for two reasons. The first reason was to increase the graduation rate in high schools. The second reason was in hopes to find a way to decrease the probability of African Americans entering the penal system. The placement of African American students in special education programs has a lifelong adverse effect on students (Clark, 2008). Placement of African American students in special education programs limits them from job opportunities, as they often are unprepared to face future employment qualifications and responsibilities. This study has made me realize the importance of making educators aware of problems African American students' face that may have lifelong implications if educators do not make change in our schools.

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Appendix A: School Counselor Duties

These duties reflect the responsibilities of the school counselor in relation to African

American students.

504 MEETINGS AND REFERRALS

ACCC JUMPSTART- DEC-MAY

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL REFERRALS AND PLACEMENT

ATLANTIC CARE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH REFERRALS

ATTENDANCE ISSUES- TRUANCY AS WELL AS MEDIATION

COIN PROGRAM

COLLEGE AND MILITARY RECRUITMENT

COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

COLLEGE VISITATIONS

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS REGARDING STUDENT
ISSUES

CREDIT COMPLETION APPEALS- MAY/JUNE

CREDIT RESTORATION REFERRALS

DYFS

FAFSA WORKSHP- JAN/FEB

FOLLOWING YEAR COURSE SELECTION PROCESS- FEB/MARCH

FRESHMEN WALKTHROUGH

GRADUATION PREPARATION

GRADUATION WARNING LETTERS- FEB

I&RS/ACEIS REFERRALS AND MEETINGS
IN-CLASS PRESENTATION REGARDING POST-SECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

MONITORING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PROGRESS

NCAA CLEARINGHOUSE

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS COUNSELORS FAIR-NOV

NEW STUDENT REGISTRATIONS

OPEN HOUSE

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

PIP

PRESENTATION FOR 8TH GRADE PARENTS FROM SENDING DISTRICTS- FALL AND SPRING

PSAT OCT

SAT AND ACT

SCHOLARSHIPS AND SUMMER INSTITUTES

SENIOR/ JUNIOR INFORMATION NIGHT

SENIOR TRANSCRIPTS

STUDENT ISSUES

TESTING (HSPA AND AHSA)

Teacher Responsibilities

These duties reflect the responsibilities of the teacher in relation to African American

students.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS
The primary goal of classroom teachers is to use class time as efficiently as possible to teach as effectively as possible. A smoothly run class can be attributed, in part, to teachers and students knowing what is expected of each other. Observe and verbally motivate students to their next destination during the passing of class.
DAILY
1. **Hall** – Greet students at the door, and begin the lesson at the start of the bell. Check student's ID and dress code compliance. If student is out of dress code, send student to his/her Assistant Principal's office with a pass.

2. **Punctuality** – Require students to report promptly to class; assign a teacher detention for each instance of tardiness and follow the discipline guidelines. Students reporting more than five (5) minutes late to class should be written up for a cut.

3. **Attendance** – Maintain accurate attendance records. The teacher **must** keep a daily attendance record in the roll book and complete the attendance, before the end of the period. Inspect and sign admission slips. Refrain from admitting students on the Discipline/Exclusion List unless they have a slip indicating they have been cleared by an Assistant Principal. If a student on the Discipline/Exclusion List reports to class without a clearance slip, call for a Safety Officer to escort the student to their Assistant Principal's office.

4. **Seating Charts** – Update seating charts and other pertinent materials that will be required by a substitute in your absence.

5. **Passes** – Refrain from permitting students to leave class the first ten minutes of class or the last five minutes of class.
a. Use and complete the standard pass.
b. Students using the lobby telephones while school is in session is prohibited.
Emergency phone calls by students can be made in their Assistant Principal's office with permission from their Assistant Principal.
c. Teachers should not detain students from a scheduled class.
d. Teachers should not call students from another scheduled class.

6. **Dismissal** – Require students to remain in their seats until the teacher dismisses them from their seats at the passing bell.

WEEKLY
Lesson Plans – Submit **weekly** lesson plans to the Department Supervisor each Thursday

Administrative Duties

These duties reflect the responsibilities of the teacher in relation to African American

students.

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL JOB DESCRIPTION

The Assistant Principal's primary job responsibility is the supervision, discipline, and monitoring of students. The Assistant Principal, under the direction of the Building Principal, implements and enforces school board policies, administrative rules and regulations. In the absence of the Building Principal, the Assistant Principal shall assume the duties and responsibilities of the Building Principal. The Assistant Principal will work cooperatively with the District Administrator and administrative team, support district-wide goals and initiatives, and be held directly accountable to the District Administrator.

QUALIFICATIONS: Possess a valid administrative license

REPORTS TO: Building Principal and District Administrator

SUPERVISES: Students and Staff

PERFORMANCE RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Adheres to and enforces board policy, school guidelines, administrative directives, the Master Contract, and district standards.
2. Enforces guidelines to maintain proper discipline and conduct.
3. Assists in the development and administration of policies dealing with discipline, conduct, and attendance.
4. Communicates relevant policies and procedures with regard to student discipline, conduct, and attendance to students, staff, and parents.
5. Assists the Building Principal with student expulsions.
6. Works with and assists faculty in the development of effective classroom discipline and organization.
7. Maintains an effective and safe school environment.
8. Assists Building Principal with fire, storm and tornado drills on a regular basis and is able to implement emergency evacuations and lock-downs effectively.
9. Assists in curriculum development to meet the needs of all students.
10. Prepares required reports and paperwork such as discipline reports, suspension reports, expulsion paperwork, discrimination complaints, injury reports, parent communications, and other paperwork as assigned.
11. Works with the Building Principal in the preparation of appropriate handbooks.
12. Assists in the selection and mentoring of staff.
13. Supervises and evaluates certified and paraprofessional as assigned.

14. Supervises support services as assigned.

15. Assists in the development of an instructional budget.

16. Works as a team member to meet the system-wide needs of the district.

17. Assists in supervision of special events.

18. Assists in the care and management of the building and grounds, furniture, equipment, apparatus, books, and supplies.

19. Notifies the Building Principal when maintenance is needed.

20. Performs other duties as assigned by the Building Principal or District Administrator.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?
2. How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?
3. Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?
4. Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What problems do you have when communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?
6. What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?
7. What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?
8. How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?
9. How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?
10. Do you think special education benefits students who are a part of the program? Please explain.

Appendix C: Transcriptions

School Counselor #1= S1

R: Researcher   S1: School Counselor

R: How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?

S1: Only in this school district. 10 years elementary and then probably 4 year's high school.

R: How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

S1: I guess one thing we have been focusing on this year for next year is the reading program and just getting their reading levels up and where they need to be so that they will be more successful in the classroom. Academics is just one piece of it, there is so much more. Part of it is just getting them here and making it enjoyable when they're here so that they want to come, this is what we have to build on. The academics is just one piece.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

S1: Hmm…Let me think about that for a moment. It's really hard to say since we have such a diverse population but on the surface I think all students are treated equally.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

S1: Yes I noticed that we have more Hispanic and African American students who are in special ed.

R: What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

S1: Sometimes it's hard because I don't think some kids are realistic. Some say they want to be basketball players and go to the NBA and I need them to think about a backup plan, so I ask them if the NBA doesn't work out how will you take care of yourself? That would be an example of something that I struggle with, with some of the students.

R: What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

S1: Mmm, I think if we enhance the reading program that would help significantly and that is something the district is trying to do.

R: What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

S1: My role is sort of the next step after the teacher refers the student and then I become the gatekeeper between the teacher and the parent monitoring the whole process.

R: How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

S1: Once a teacher refers the student, I gather all the paperwork and then everything goes to the Child Study Team, so the decision is pretty much made before it gets to me by the teacher.

R: How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

S1: I pretty much go along with the referral of the teacher unless the parent disputes it. Once I gather all the necessary information I hand it over to the Child Study Team.

R: Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

S1: I do, I do yeah I think that in general students are provided information that they can benefit from. I really do.

School Counselor #2

R: Researcher   S2: School Counselor

R: How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?

S2: Six years and I spent three years as a classroom teacher.

R: How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

S2: By making sure they have the correct placement, I'm talking about their class levels and being here to support them when it comes to guidance.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

S2: No for the most part I think all of our students are treated equally.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

S2: I wouldn't say we have an overrepresentation but the numbers for some groups are a little higher than others.

R: What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

S2: I don't have too many problems with that because I help students come up with a Plan A and a Plan B. Sometimes Plan A is something they dream of and Plan B is more realistic and by graduation they are not disappointed if they are not pursuing Plan A, they are just happy they have a plan in place. Most of my parents are happy too.

R: What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

S2: That's a good question and honestly I'm not sure. I just feel if the student needs the help and support we should provide it.

R: What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

S2: My role is to make sure the process runs smoothly between everyone involved. That is the parent, student, teacher, and a member of the Child Study Team.

R: How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

S2: Most of the time I will receive a referral from one of their teachers but sometimes if I see their grades are suffering I will make the referral myself.

R: How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

S2: Not that often, maybe one or two students a year if necessary.

R: Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

S2: Yes if they are placed correctly. Sometimes students are classified too early and I don't think they benefit. That's just my opinion.

Administrator #1

R: Researcher   A1: Administrator

R: How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?

A1: Oh…mmm.. about 38 years. I officially retired about five years ago but I keep getting pulled back in but I enjoy what I do.

R: How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

A1: By leading by example. Since I'm a minority myself, I think perception is very important along with interaction with the kids.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

A1: That question can be answered in a number of ways but let me answer it pertaining to this particular school. I would have to say No because now more than ever all kids have so many great opportunities.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

A1: No I don't feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented because in my years of experience I have seen it vary from school to school.

R: What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

A1: I don't think I have a problem communicating at all. What I do notice is that a lot of kids come in their freshman year and don't have a clue about what they want to do but it usually pans out around their junior and senior year.

R: What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

A1: I think there are a number of things that can be done. I think the main thing is everyone working together as a team to make sure the kids are receiving what they need. Especially when it comes to reading, I think that's a huge part of the problem.

R: What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

A1: As an administrator I don't play a big role in the referral process but I do get involved especially when a parent is not pleased or has a complaint.

R: How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

A1: I don't decide that is handled by the guidance department, unless a parent comes to me with a request.

R: How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

A1: I don't.

R: Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

A1: Yes I do because some students really need the extra help and support. Some students just aren't good test takers, some just need their assignments broken down a little more but I definitely see the benefit.

Administrator #2

R: Researcher   A2: Administrator

R: How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?

A2: 16 years and I basically have only worked in this school district but I have been in different buildings. Alternative school and the high school.

R: How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

A2: By making sure my staff is doing their job and giving the students the support they need.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

A2: No because I think our staff does a pretty good job tending to our students needs but I do feel that sometimes students can get over looked.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

A2: No I don't. We have a diverse population of students who receive special education services.

R: What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

A2: Well most of the students I talk with have some disciplinary issues. So when I ask them what do they want to do when they graduate they usually say they don't know. From there I may call their counselor so they can talk with them in detail about goals after high school.

R: What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

A2: I think getting the parents involved on a day to day basis will help. Nowadays the school is left to do so much.

R: What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

A2: If I start to see a student frequently and they are receiving a lot of suspensions. I will look at their grades and speak with their parents and make a referral to their guidance counselor.

R: How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

A2: Basically, after that last process I described.

R: How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

A2: Well I refer them to their counselor and the counselor refers them to the Child Study Team.

R: Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

A2: Yes and No and let me explain. For some the help is beneficial because they need the extra support and for others the placement could be wrong and their self-esteem becomes low and I have seen some kids dropout of school because they didn't feel like they could accomplish anything. So it has its pro's and con's.

General Education Teacher #1

R: Researcher   T1: General Education Teacher

R: How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?

T1: I have been a teacher for three years.

R: How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

T1: I don't think it's about accommodating just minority students but what I look at is my students as individuals. Each child's needs are different and I like to see what area they are weak in and give them extra support in that particular area.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

T1: No I don't because again I look at all of my students as individuals and not one particular population or group.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

T1: Well I haven't referred any students for special education so I'm not exactly sure of the population but right off the top of my head…uh, I would have to say No.

R: What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

T1: Some of my students in general are not realistic while others have very real expectations. I just try to get them to see some options for themselves, so to answer the question I don't really think I have a problem communicating with them.

R: What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

T1: I would say getting reading levels up because that's what I see kids struggling with and you need reading for every subject. Not only just reading but comprehension as well.

R: What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

T1: I haven't referred any students since I've been here but if I need to it would be through the guidance counselor.

R: How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

T1: Well if they are struggling in more than one subject area, I would talk to the child's guidance counselor and reach out to the parent and let them know what's going on and take it from there.

R: How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

T1: I haven't referred anyone to the Child Study Team.

R: Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

T1: I think if the student needs it, yes.

General Education Teacher #2

R: Researcher   T2: General education teacher

R: How many years have you been an educator and tell me a little about your experience?

T2: I have been an educator for nine years. Three years at another school and six years at this school.

R: How do you feel you can better accommodate minority students?

T2: I give all students support and make accommodations according to their needs.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are underserved? If so, why? If not, why not?

T2: Mmmm…I'm not sure how to answer that question because if my goal is to serve all my students which it is, then none of my students are underserved. So my answer would have to be No and I hope I already explained why.

R: Do you feel that any particular population of students are overrepresented in special education? If so, why? If not, why not?

T2: Although I don't teach special education I do know that the research shows that there are more minority students in special ed. but based on my school I would have to say yes and no because I see more boys in special ed. than girls but not one particular race of students. I hope that answers the question.

R: What problems do you have communicating expectations to minority students? For example, academics and choices after high school?

T2: I'm not sure. Let's see you are talking about teenagers and a majority of them change what they want to do after high school like every day. You do get a few that may have some idea. I just talk to them about options and try to keep it simple so on that note the communication is clear.

R: What do you think can be done to limit the number of referrals into special education programs?

T2: What can be done to limit referrals is getting students the extra help they need which the help is there because we have afterschool tutoring but getting the kids to go is a different story. I really think that would help a lot.

R: What is your role in the process of referring students into special education?

T2: My role in the process is to identify a student that is struggling and when I have used all my options as a teacher to try and help the student and they are still struggling then I consult with his or her counselor and they may recommend the next step and that could be a referral to the Child Study Team.

R: How do you decide when a student needs to be referred to receive special education services?

T2: That's sort of like the last question so I would use the same process.

R: How often do you refer students to the Child Study Team?

T2: Only on an as needed basis which is not that often.

R: Do you think special education benefits students who are part of the program? Please explain.

T2: Yes I do because there are a lot of students who need modifications and they wouldn't get that in a regular class setting.

Curriculum Vitae

Y D E A I R A   E .   E L Y

EMPLOYMENT	ATLANTIC CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION Atlantic City, NJ
2007 – Present	ATLANTIC CITY HIGH SCHOOL

(2,300 Student population / 220 faculty members)
Assistant Principal/Disciplinarian
Responsible for managing, overseeing and resolving all discipline and attendance issues involving students with diverse behavioral problems. Interact with guidance counselors, child study team, 3 assistant principals, 3 supervisors, faculty, security and Atlantic Care Behavioral Health to facilitate and assure daily classroom/school management and compliances. Schedule and participate in parent conferences. Participate in teacher observation and evaluation. Work in close conjunction with student achievement program.

2008 – 2011   Rehabilitative Adolescent Program
Hammonton, NJ
Master Therapist
Responsible for providing therapy to children ages 10-18 with emotional and behavioral issues. Helped resolve behavioral problems with children along with assisting families in collaboration with Social Services.

2001- 2007   ATLANTIC CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION   Atlantic City, NJ
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. COMPLEX SCHOOL
Teacher – Grade 7 - Language Arts / Social Studies
Responsible for teaching required curricula in above subjects. Implemented diverse teaching techniques to enhance students' interest to learn and also implemented excellent classroom management procedures. Interacted with Child Study Team. Focused on meeting individual students' IEP goals. Maintained ongoing interaction with administration, faculty, students and parents to facilitate daily activities and addressed and resolved arising issues as needed.

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM
Title 1 Teacher
Enhanced learning skills of students to meet state guidelines – GEPA (Grades 7-8), NJ ASK (Grades 3–7)

Teacher – Homebound Students Grades K–12
Provided instruction in all subjects to assigned students.

2002 – 2007   ATLANTIC CARE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM – Grades K-12
Teacher – Grades K-8
Provided supplemental reinforcement and homework assistance for groups of up to six students.
•Century 21 Grant Teacher
Teacher – Grades 8–12
Introduced and developed Job Readiness Skills and support for students in grades 8–12. Maintained proactive discipline.

2006 – 2007   OCEANSIDE CHARTER SCHOOL
Teacher Saturday School – Grades 5–8
Enhanced students' knowledge in Language Arts, Mathematics and Social Studies. Report to Director.
Teacher – Grade 2
Taught required curricula and motivated students of all levels. Evaluated and assessed students and developed plans of study to meet individual student needs.
Maximized potential of students with little classroom resources.

EDUCATION   CHEYNEY UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, Cheyney, PA
M.A. Educational Administration - 2006
Graduated with Honors

RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY, Pomona, NJ
B.A. History & Education – 2000
Minor: African American Studies
Dean's List

**Additional career-related training – Participate in ongoing Professional Development Workshops, i.e., Writing … Reading … Literacy Collaborative … Class Management … Holistic Scoring Using Rubrics … Study Buddy (reinforcement program)**

Dean's List
Additional career-related training – Participate in ongoing Professional Development Workshops, i.e., Writing … Reading … Literacy Collaborative … Class Management … Holistic Scoring Using Rubrics … Study Buddy (reinforcement program)

CERTIFICATION   State of New Jersey…Principal's Certification
Provisional Superintendent…Teacher Grades K-8

AFFILIATIONS   New Jersey Principals/Supervisors Association (NJPSA)

National Education Association (NEA)
New Jersey Education Association (NJEA)
Atlantic City Education Association (ACEA)
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.