AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS ON TEACHER RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY

By

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ABSTRACT

KIM MIDDLETON REDDIG. African American Males' Perceptions on Teacher
Responsiveness to Cultural Diversity
(Under the direction of DR. GLORIA CAMPBELL-WHATLEY

The overrepresentation of African American males at risk for academic challenges and

special education services, disciplinary actions, dropout rates, and incarceration is an alarming

trend in the United States that has been ongoing for over 40 years. Research has shown a

correlation exists between a teachers' cultural competence and a students' positive academic and

behavioral outcomes (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Howard & Terry, 2011; Rychly & Graves, 2012).

However, many teachers are inadequately prepared with appropriate content knowledge,

experience with culturally relevant practices, and training to address culturally and linguistically

diverse students' learning needs (Sobel et al., 2011). A cultural learning gap between teachers

and students, along with, inadequate preparation can limit the choice of effective culturally

responsive practices. An educator's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations can have a major impact

on student outcomes. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culturally responsive teachers place culture at the

center of their teaching philosophy and continuously investigate opportunities to factor culture

into all aspects of their teaching to improve the performance of diverse students and close the

achievement gap (Bonner et al., 2018). The aim of this study was to understand the perceptions

of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for

academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. This study used a

phenomenological qualitative method to gain insight into the lived experiences of African

American males. Limitations, implications for practices and suggestions for future research are

discussed.

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DEDICATION

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Disproportionality

Over the years, numerous scholars have investigated the overrepresentation of African American males in special education (Ahram et al., 2011; Dever et al., 2016; Harber et al., 2012; Lott-Daley, 2013; Woodson & Harris, 2018; Zhang, 2012). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) ruled it unconstitutional for racial segregation of children in public schools, resulting in school districts in California to use special education classes as a cover for segregation (Prasse & Reschly, 1986). Parents of African American children in elementary school in the San Francisco Unified School District charged the courts to desegregate the schools (Johnson v. San Francisco, 1974). Also, in that same year, plaintiffs in Larry P. et al. v. Wilson Riles et al. (1979) filed a lawsuit, accusing a San Francisco school district which discriminated against five African American children who were placed in educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes.

The disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs has long been a focus of discussion for teachers, educational leaders, and researchers (Bal et al., 2014). Deliberations' surrounding the overrepresentation of African American students in the field of special education has highlighted disproportionality as a problem and possible solutions have been conducted for the past 40 years (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Raines et al., (2012) states that disproportionality refers to the "unequal" number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education programs. Although No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA) provided guidelines to protect the rights of students from CLD backgrounds, research

has shown that when race was the only predictor, African American students have had a significantly higher possibility of being classified as students with an Emotional or Behavior Disordered (EBD) when compared to White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). According to the 41st Annual Report to Congress on the IDEA, non-majority populations are represented disproportionately in special education programs, especially for the categories of mild mental retardation and behavior disorders (U.S. Department of Education, USDOE, 2019).

Among the students receiving special education services in 2018-2019, 33% had specific learning disabilities (SLD), 19% had speech language disabilities (SI), and 15% had other health impairment (OHI). In this same school year, 2018-2019, the percentage of students served under IDEA was 7.1 million, or 14% of all public-school students. The highest percent of students served under IDEA was American Indian/Alaska Native (18%), followed by African Americans (16%), White (14%), Multiracial (14%), Latinx, (13%), Pacific Islander (11%), and Asian (7%) (NCES, 2019). One of the main reason students are placed in special education has been race (Hehir, et al., 2012; Dever et al., 2016). Learners from historically underserved groups, specifically African Americans, are disproportionately represented in high-incidence disability categories (Donovan & Cross, 2002; i.e., mild mental retardation [MMR], learning disability [LD], and emotional/behavioral disorder [EBD]). The overrepresentation of African-American males at risk for EBD remains a heated topic both nationally and internationally (Artiles & Bal, 2008) because the percentage placed in EBD classes (26%) is almost twice their representation in the overall school population (14.8%). African Americans presence in EBD classes is greater than any other ethnic group, and is profoundly biased toward males (Cartledge et al., 2008). Characterized by EBD placement, African American males have been categorized as having low

educational achievement, inappropriate behaviors, and social maladjustments more than any other disability groups (Bradley et al., 2008; Frank, et al., 1995). Regulations were issued by the USDOE 2016 to encourage states to proactively address racial and ethnic disproportions in the classification, placement, and discipline of children with disabilities. The report also contained federal civil rights and disability studies stating that it is the schools' responsibilities to treat everyone fairly regardless of ethnicity, nationality, gender or cultural background in the field of special education.

Although numerous scholars have investigated why there is an overrepresentation of African Americans, particularly males, in special education programs, the exact cause remains unclear. The National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES;2019), Condition of Education report offers one explanation. Nationally 80% of public-school teachers were White (Ladson-Billings, 2001; USDOE, 1998) whereas, according to demographic students from CLD backgrounds represent more than a third of children in both elementary and secondary schools (Weinstein et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is believed many White American teachers originate from predominantly White American communities and attended primarily predominantly White institutions (Howard, 2006; Milner, 2010). Generalized discriminatory attitudes, either conscious or unconscious, on the part of teachers possibly predominates the specific issues of student placement in special education (Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016). Researchers, such as Jacoby-Senghor et al., (2016), found that teachers' implicit bias predicted lower performance and test scores for African American students but not White students. He also found that teachers' uneasiness with lesson planning for CLD students played a role in the relationship between the teachers' implicit bias and the students' test performance. These findings suggest the low academic performance of students of color may be attributed to the implicit racial biases of teachers' pedagogical efficacy.

The role of history and societal expectations are also factors, as over the course of many decades, stereotypes enhance the belief that CLD students are less intelligent than White students, especially those from African Americans and Latinx backgrounds (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Teachers may unconsciously play into these stereotypes by having lower expectations for non-majority students which may end in students displaying behaviors that extend these stereotypes (National Research Council, 2002). The United States has a history of discrimination dating back to the beginning of its existence. Therefore, since implicit bias can be a part of the classroom structure, students being identified with a disability or placed in special education can be affected by these biases (Harry & Klingner, 2014).

Another explanation is the two most common tests to diagnose disabilities are the intelligence tests (IQ) and behavioral assessments. Alfred Binet, of France, created the first IQ tests. His purpose for creating the test was to help identify students who required additional assistance in schools (Beirne-Smith et al., 2002). The United States adopted the intelligence test and modified it for a different use. First, Terman (1916), one of the modifiers, designed the tests to meet the needs of the intellectual elite. Opponents of the tests, argue the IQ tests reflect the cultural knowledge of the norm for White people, and the sample of the students taking the test are based on the majority, again, the White culture. Karier, (1972) argued that the IQ tests measured privilege and status as opposed to actual ability. Hence, the entire assessment process for special education services, appears to be biased and students from CLD backgrounds who take the test are at a disadvantage (Harry & Anderson, 1994). For this reason, the Board of Assessment and Testing concluded it is essential for IQ tests used to determine special education eligibility be reevaluated for bias towards students of color (Morrison et al., 1996). As a result,

numerous states have implemented the Response to Intervention (RTI) or other Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) models to determine eligibility for special education services.

Educational Outcomes

Most research on education relating to CLD students suggests on average that African American children enter kindergarten with lower oral language, reading, mathematics, and general knowledge skills when compared to their White peers (Boykin et al., 2005; Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000; Egalite et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Wright et al., 2016). In 2019, there was no significant difference in math scores among African American 4th and 8th graders when compared to math scores in 2017. The reading scores among African American 4th and 8th graders decreased in 2019 when compared to reading scores in 2017 (NCES, 2019). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; NCES, 2019) 45% of fourth grade students with disabilities performed at or above grade level in mathematics, whereas, 85% of students without disabilities performed at or above grade level in mathematics. Overall, 26% of eighth grade students with disabilities were performing at or above grade level, in contrast to 74% of students without disabilities. The same report noted 26% of fourth grade students with disabilities performed at or above grade level in reading, compared to 71% of students without disabilities. However, 31% of eighth grade students with disabilities were performing at or above grade level, although eight grade students without disabilities performed at 87%.

Nationally, 67% of students with disabilities graduate on time, which is well below to the 83% graduation rate for all students. According to the NCES (2019), during the 2017-18 school year, scores were lowest among African American students (66%). African American students (12%) were more likely to be placed on an alternative diploma track. Students with intellectual disabilities (32%) were more likely to graduate with a certificate. Under Every Student Succeeds

Act (ESSA), states are allowed to offer alternative diplomas. Students who receive a high school certificate, have completed high school but did not meet all of the high school requirements for graduation. The requirements to receive a certificate, is closely associated with a student's IEP.

Research shows African American students' dropout rates are overrepresented. African American students (71%) are more likely to drop out than White students. American Indian/Alaska Native students have the highest dropout rates (10.1%), followed by Latinx (8.2%), African American (6.5%), Multiracial (4.5%), White (4.3%), Pacific Islanders (3.9%), and Asian (2.1%) students. American Indian (40%), African American (71%), Latinx (148%), and Multiracial students (64%) were all more likely to drop out than their White student peers (NCES, 2017). The dropout rate was highest among students identified in the EBD category 32%.

Vega et al., (2015) examined African American males' perception of perceived barriers relating to education. Findings showed students regarded their relationships with teachers as positively linked to the students' academic performance. Sealey-Ruiz & Green, (2015) argued another barrier interfering with the equitable education of CLD students is that they receive lower quality education when compared to their White peers. Some teachers perceive African American males to be less academically motivated to succeed. Research on students and teachers of the same race/ethnicity suggest there are academic benefits for students of color because the teachers also serve as mentors, role models, and advocates (Egalite et al., 2015; Sealy-Ruiz, & Green, 2015; Vega et al., 2015). Osher et al., (2014) agreed that changing the low academic performance of African American males with disabilities requires the teachers' ability to effectively address the social and academic needs of their students, regardless of cultural differences. Vygotsky (as cited by Kea et al., 2003) endorsed the idea that getting to know the

family of a student helps with developing a better understanding of the student. It is also critical

for teachers to have the knowledge of the controlling societal forces affecting their students'

lives. Understanding the sociocultural and socio-political progressions and challenges of

students' ethnic community through the lens of the students will help teachers develop and

implement a culturally responsive curricula for African American students with disabilities (Kea

& Campbell-Whatley, 2003).

Disciplinary referrals

Much research on discipline and students from CLD backgrounds has been conducted.

Studies have found that CLD students are disciplined more often and receive tougher

consequences than their White counterparts for the same violations (Anyon et al., 2018, Bryan et

al., 2011; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Skiba et

al., 2011; Smolkowski et al., 2016). Since as early as 1975, it has been documented that African

American males have been overrepresented in most school suspensions and expulsion as

disciplinary consequences (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Fenning & Rose, 2007). In a study

conducted by Studley, (2002), discipline data from six of California's largest school districts

were examined. Two years of data were reviewed during the study. Findings specified when

compared to any other ethnic group, African American students received the highest number of

suspensions (Townsend, 2000). In addition, African American students' disciplinary

consequences of suspensions and expulsions are three times greater than White students

(Townsend, 2000). Statistics show 5% of White students are suspended, whereas 16% of African

American students receive suspension as a disciplinary action. (Civil Rights Data Collection,

[CRDC], 2014). African American students represented higher proportions of total days served

for both in-school and out-of-school suspension. This data shows African American students are

given longer suspensions than White students (CRDC, 2014). For incidents of subjective offenses, African American students (51%) were suspended at a higher rate when compared to White students (46%; CRDC, 2014). Smolkowski et al., (2016) conducted a study using disciplinary data and office referrals from elementary schools to identify specific situations in which disproportionality was more likely. Results indicated a disproportionate representation of race and gender for classroom behaviors that appeared to be subjectively defined by the teacher, and behaviors that were categorized as more severe by administration (Smolkowski, 2016). It was also noted that the time of day the incident occurred was also a contributing factor of disproportionality (Smolkowski). Most often African American males are socially and culturally misunderstood by their teachers, which may result in unwise school practices that are disadvantageous to them (Wright et al., 2015).

Anyon et al., (2018) investigated the relationship between students' racial background and office referrals. Findings show that African American, Latinx, and Multiracial students received more office referrals than their white peers. Even more than that, students were more likely to receive office referrals while in the classroom setting. Anyon et al., (2018) concluded systematic biases are prevalent discipline policies and practices. Neal et al., (2003) conducted a study to examine how teachers perceived African American students' cultural movement styles (i.e., walking) as a contributing factor of African American males' aggression, academic achievement and need for special education services. Results showed teachers believed there was a solid link between African American culture–related movement styles and low academic achievement, aggressive behavior, and the need for special education services. Implicit bias may also play a role in disciplinary decisions and special education referrals of African American males.

Discipline and special education referrals may rely more heavily on the teachers' negative racial stereotypes as opposed to knowledge about the individual student (McIntosh et al., 2017).

In 2018, the United States Government Office of Accountability (GAO), reported although students with disabilities accounted for only 12% of all K-12 population, these students account for a quarter of suspensions, expulsions and referrals to law enforcement. When compared to students without disabilities (6%), students with disabilities (13%) are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension (GAO, 2018). Students with disabilities (58%) were more likely to be confined or secluded from the general population, and 75% were physically restrained by staff to control their actions (GAO, 2018). According to the USDOE Office of Civil Rights (OCR; 2014), African American students served under IDEA represented 19% of students with disabilities; however, 36% of those African American students received harsh disciplinary actions. Also, OCR, (2014), reported that although students with disabilities represent 12% of the total student population, they represent 30% of students arrested and referred to law enforcement in educational settings (GAO, 2018).

School to Prison Pipeline

Sakala, (2014) reported African Americans and Latinx persons are among the largest percentage of inmates in correctional facilities in the United States. Based on the OCR, (2014), 27% of African American students were referred to law enforcement although they only make up 16% of student enrollment. Additionally, 31% of African American students were subjected to arrest based on school infractions. African American students consist of 41% of those referred by schools to law enforcement, and 39% of students arrested, while White students makeup 51% of the overall enrollment (OCR, 2014). Grace and Nelson (2019) examined African American male students' observations of the role of race and racism in sustaining the school-to-prison pipeline.

The participants of this study revealed that schools should consider utilizing successful African American males who can mentor, counsel, and/or advise American male students who are at risk for entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

As our society and schools continue to increase in the number CLD students, teachers have a responsibility to enhance their knowledge, skills and understanding of the role culture plays in a students' academic and behavior success, as well as the need to infuse students' culture into the classroom environment (Cartledge et al., 2016).

At-risk students

At-risk students are defined as having one or more of the following characteristics: failure in one or more grade levels, truancy, disciplinary actions, low socioeconomic status or poverty, social maladjustment, underachievement, drug use, or teenage pregnancy. One or more of these factors can contribute to at-risk students dropping out of school (Slavin & Madden, 2004). Students who are at risk also face challenges outside of school (Frymier & Gansneder, 2001). A student's socioeconomic background can be a contributing factor to their academic achievement Boykin et al., 2005; Egalite et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Language barriers, high poverty schools, exposure to low-level curriculum and limited course options can also be factors. Over the course of time, at-risk students who drop out of school are more likely to face unemployment or earn less income than students who graduated high school (Prevatt & Kelly, 2003).

Lack of Culturally Responsive Special Education Practices

The overrepresentation of diverse students with disabilities, poor achievement outcomes, discipline rates as well as dropout rates has impacted federal legislation and enhanced efforts to promote extensive research in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy. This legislation encourages teacher preparation programs to train teachers so that disproportionate placement will

lessen and students will remain in general education, the least restrictive environment, rather than being placed in classes for students with disabilities. There is a need for special education practitioners to have the competencies to implement effective culturally responsive practices to improve diverse student outcomes (Sobel et al., 2011). However, educational curriculum and standards are known to be *culturally relevant* to white, majority students since most of the content is centered on European culture, which puts students of CLD and low socioeconomic status students at a disadvantage (Boutte & Hill, 2006).

Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive pedagogy as infusing a student's culture into learning by using cultural awareness, prior knowledge, points of reference, and cultural expressions. Gay (2002) identified five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers are encouraged to: (a) research cultures other than his/her own; (b) create and implement culturally responsive curricula; (c) demonstrate cultural caring by building a family-like community in the classroom; (d) establish cross-cultural communications; and (e) establish consistency in classroom instruction. Culturally responsive pedagogy embraces four criteria including students': (a) academic success, (b) advancing their cultural competence, (c) awareness of the social injustices, and (d) recognition of means to challenge the current status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995) educators enacting culturally responsive pedagogy are to do the following: (a) emphasize preparing students for life-long learning through interactions that lead to individual and collective academic achievement and empowerment, (b) focus on cultural competence and equip students to navigate systems not designed to enable their success (c) develop sociopolitical consciousness, identify root causes of injustice, increase self-

awareness, and (d) incorporate these issues in instruction from an informed stance so that students are able to understand and critique systems and society.

Proponents of culturally responsive teaching have indicated that expressing empathy, displaying care, creating healthy classroom environments, showing leadership skills, humor, and being actively involved in students' social relations are vital characteristics for culturally competent teachers (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Monroe, 2005). Additionally, teachers' knowledge, skills and attitude towards cultural responsiveness has a major influence on student outcomes (Gay, 2002). Howard (2006) stated the significance of teachers building solid relationships with students, which suggests to the students that the teacher genuinely cares for them. Infusing the students' culture into the learning environment validates the students' existence. Teachers' ability to be critical of their own sociocultural consciousness and how it impacts their own attitudes and actions towards students from CLD backgrounds is of greatest importance. Each of these influential studies claimed effective teachers of students from CLD backgrounds use active direct instruction that incorporates a number of values of effective instruction, including the use of: (a) early intervention assessment methods to identify learning gaps in academics and the implementation of rigorous interventions; (b) detailed, clear, and measurable learning objectives; (c) progress monitoring to track growth of their learning; and (d) organized classroom lessons and activities to enhance active student responses to integrate a steady instructional pace, and provide positive corrective feedback to students (Fuchs et al., 2005; Heward, 1994, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The classroom climate, which includes the physical structure, underlying tone, interactions amongst students and relationships between teacher and students, has a major effect on learning. Aside from academic learning, students learn about their own culture along with the cultural background of their peers. Students also learn to function in a society of people

from various ethnic upbringings, which aids them in becoming social conscious adults. Previous research shows a strong correlation between culturally responsive teaching and academic achievement of diverse students (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Howard & Terry, 2011; Rychly & Graves, 2012). Gay, (2000), Ladson-Billings, (1994), and Milner, (2010) argue the effectiveness of using culturally responsive instruction and curriculum in schools. It is noted that diverse students' success is dependent upon the several factors, such as, culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant curriculum, and knowledge of cultural differences among students, in addition to, the state/local curricular directives, variations of students, and social customs students encounter in school (Williams et al., 2019).

Teachers' Inability to Instruct Students from CLD Backgrounds

The goal of culturally responsive pedagogy allows teachers to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, and the role their background has on their ability to teach students of color. (Keengwe, 2010). The education programs at higher learning institutions are inadequately preparing new teachers to teach culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002). Few courses on diversity are offered in educational preparation programs (Gay, 2002). Teacher education programs and licensure requirements do not contain isolated coursework with cultural responsiveness, which signals that there is a need for a movement toward culturally responsive practices in teacher preparation education programs (Kea et al., 2002).

It is imperative that teacher preparation programs prepare teachers to instruct students from CLD backgrounds. However, a number of studies found special education teachers are not prepared to provide culturally responsive instruction. Specifically, Artiles et al., (2004); Dominguez, (2006); and Boykin et al., (2006) revealed that teachers selected instructional materials without the consideration of students with disabilities' cultural and linguistic

background. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) professional standards mandates teachers demonstrate a cultural responsiveness to diversity, yet, there is still apprehension around teachers' ability to develop culturally relevant teaching practices and materials to meet the educational needs of CLD students. (Chu & Garcia, 2014). According to Vaughn (2007, p.1), teacher education preparation programs have required teachers to take a course on diversity or multicultural education during their program of study, however, these preservice teachers continue to "lack the depth of understanding needed to design, develop, and implement high impact cultural diversity education." All teachers should learn effective culturally responsive teaching practices. Teacher educators must be knowledgeable about cultural diversity and have dispositions that afford them the capability of modeling effective teaching practices, infusing diversity into the curriculum, and creating a warm classroom environment (Siwato, 2007). Preservice teachers should have the opportunity to observe culturally responsive teaching during their field experience. Additionally, they should also be given the opportunity to practice culturally responsive teaching during that time as well; yet, this seldom happens (Siwatu, 2011). Williams et al., (2019), acknowledges, preservice teachers' lack of understanding of cultural and intercultural competence hinders the development of culturally responsive teachers.

Summary

The overrepresentation of African American males at risk for academic challenges and receiving special education services, disciplinary actions, dropout rates, and incarceration is an alarming trend in the United States that has been ongoing for over 40 years. Research has shown a correlation exists between a teachers' cultural competence and a students' positive academic and behavioral outcomes (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Howard & Terry, 2011; Rychly & Graves, 2012).

However, many teachers are inadequately prepared with appropriate content knowledge, experience with culturally relevant practices, and training to address CLD students' learning needs (Sobel et al., 2011). A cultural learning gap between teachers and students, along with, inadequate preparation can limit the choice of effective culturally responsive practices. An educator's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations can have a major impact on student outcomes. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culturally responsive teachers place culture at the center of their teaching philosophy and continuously investigate opportunities to factor culture into all aspects of their teaching to improve the performance of diverse students and close the achievement gap (Bonner et al., 2018).

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity.

1. How do high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity?

2. From the perspective of African American male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom?

Significance of Study

This study will add to the research base in multiple ways. First, the study will add to the efficacy of culturally responsive teachers as few studies exist. Howard, (2001; 2002) published a study of African American student perceptions of culturally relevant teachers. Moreover, there has been a dearth of research exploring African American males with disabilities and those at

risk for academic challenges perception on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Support for such research would enable teachers to utilize culturally responsive teaching to improve academic and behavior outcomes of students from CLD backgrounds.

Limitations/Delimitations

The aim of this study is to examine perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Findings are critical to developing a better understanding of the role teachers play in enhancing CLD students' academic and behavioral outcomes, and contribute to the discussion on school policies and reform. Additionally, these findings will have implications for the teacher educational preparation programs to prepare future teachers to be both competent and confident in their abilities to execute the practices of culturally responsive teaching. This study resulted in a few limitations. First, the study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which interfered with the researcher's ability to conduct face-to-face focus groups. Secondly, the study constituted a small sample size. Third, direct observations of the students and teachers were not conducted. Finally, culturally responsive teaching training was not included in this study.

Definitions

The terms and definitions listed below are used to describe literature and methodology relevant to this study. These terms are critical to understanding this study's purpose, implementation procedures, and potential contributions to the field of education.

African American Students: African American students are also referred to as Black, or Black American. It also includes other African countries, such as, African Caribbean or African Canadian heritage, who share some of the same cultural characteristics as African Americans.

At-risk Students: "students who exhibit challenges with academic achievement" (Quinnan, 1997, p. 31). An at-risk student often requires provisional or continuing interventions to be academically or behaviorally successful in school. When used in educational research and practice, the term "at-risk" refers to students who do not perform well in traditional educational settings.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students: an individual whose cultural backgrounds are different from the cultural norm of the majority. Additionally, an individual who speaks another language other than English in the home.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: a conceptual framework that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural background in all aspects of learning within the school environment (Ladson-Billings,1994).

Disproportionality: the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a given population in an identified group of people (Losen & Orfield, 2005). For the purpose of this study, In this study, disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education services, disciplinary referrals, exclusionary discipline, dropout rates, and school-to-prison pipeline.

Inclusive Settings: Students with disabilities are educated in the regular education setting with in-class support along with their non-disabled peers.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: In the United States, the school-to-prison pipeline is the disproportionate representation of children and adolescents from disadvantage backgrounds to become imprisoned due to the increasingly severe and frequent school suspensions and expulsions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes the literature relevant to the role of cultural responsiveness to African American male students with and without disabilities. This first section describes the plight of African Americans in schools as it pertains to disproportionality in special education, disciplinary referrals, and school-to-prison pipeline. The second section presents literature on the impact of culturally responsive teaching on school achievement for students of color. The last section describes training for preservice and inservice teachers on culturally responsive teaching including teacher, student, and parent's perceptions and attitudes toward culturally responsive instruction.

Disproportionality and African American Students

Definitions

There are many ways that disproportionality can be defined. For our purposes, disproportionality is defined as "the overrepresentation or under-representation of a particular population or demographic group in special or gifted education programs relative to the presence of this group in the overall student population" (National Association for Bilingual Education, 2002). Special Education Disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a number of students in a specific group who as a result of belonging to the group will likely be placed in a specific disability category. Disciplinary Disproportionality refers to students from a particular racial/ethnic group being disproportionately represented in office discipline referrals, suspensions, school arrests, and expulsion (Sullivan, 2010). The disproportionate representation of students of color, specifically African Americans, in special education has been documented extensively by researchers (Cartledge & Dukes, 2008; Connor et al., 2019; Coutinho, 2000; Jordan, 2020; Proctor et al., 2012). When analyzing the causes of disproportionality in special

education, unconscious bias is noted as a contributory factor (Rudd, 2014). The role of unconscious biases must be addressed, if we want to diminish and eradicate racial disproportionality in education.

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias directly impacts teachers' beliefs, thoughts, and actions (Staats, 2016). Losen and Orfield (2002) suggested unconscious bias, resource inequalities, and inadequate relationships between students and teachers are possible contributing factors for disproportionality of students from CLD backgrounds in special education. In a study examining overrepresentation, Shippen et al., (2009) examined the perceptions of general and special education teachers and school counselors on the overrepresentation of non-majority students, especially African American males in special education. The district in which this study took place was identified as having a chronic problem overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs. The participants included elementary general education teachers (n=5), special education teachers (n=4), and school counselors (n=4). The study revealed general education teachers and school counselors shared an unfamiliarity of the problem and a great deal of misunderstanding, however, special education teachers expressed that overrepresentation does currently exist in their school district. Both general and special education teachers shared concerns about the assessment process and school counselors voiced confusion of their understanding of the assessment process pertaining to the special education identification process. The participants identified susceptibility variables for students being identified as special education. Sociodemographic variables, parents/family, and disability variables can strongly support systematic bias. This study's findings show when teachers link individuals from a minority population with a susceptibility variable (e.g., sociodemographic variables,

parents/family, disability variables) this became the reason for labeling the student in special education. Discrimination and unintentional bias that create a culture of systemic racism in the schools, can result from susceptibility variables.

Teachers' misconceptions and reactions to students' cultural behaviors can lead to students' lack of success and social failure (Brown, 2007; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Gay, 2002; 2010; 2013; Howard, 2001; 2002; 2016; Irvine, 2010; Sobel et al., 2011). Neal et al., (2003) investigated how 136 middle school teachers perceived African American males' aggressive behavior, academic achievement and need for special education services based on the student's cultural movement styles which included how the student walked. A randomized factorial analysis of variance was used. Each participant was asked to review a videotape of an African American male and a White male demonstrating two different walking styles; (a) standard and (b) stroll. Four videotapes were developed: two showing the movement style of the African American student, and two showing the White student's movement styles. The teachers also completed a questionnaire in conjunction with the videos. Findings suggested the cultural behavior (walking) of African American males contributed to teachers' misconceptions of students' low achievement skills, aggressive behavior and the need for special education services.

There are few studies that examine the perceptions of students, however, Hensfield (2011) conducted a qualitative case study to examine the perceptions of middle school African American males on microaggression. A purposeful sampling procedure was implemented to assess five African American eighth-grade male students between the ages of 13-14. The middle school consisted of 945 students, 34 African American males and 33 African American females, with only African American students being 7.1% of the student body. Data collection consisted

of the examination of documents (i.e., school, student, state, and family demographic data) accompanied by semi-structured individual interviews. Students were asked to share their beliefs and experiences with microaggression within their predominately White school environment. The four themes that emerged from this study included the assumption of: (a) deviance, (b) criminality, (c) universality of the African American experience, and (d) superiority of White cultural values/communication styles. Results showed that four out of the five students shared that they had experienced microaggression at some point in their schooling. One of the male African-American students expressed that the middle school lacked African American culture representation, and teachers' lessons were not interesting to him. Another African American male, shared that there were many stereotypes exhibited. He stated that there were some teachers at the school who still felt African American males were gangbangers and killers. He also expressed the need for teachers to be aware of the culture differences of their students and to make more of an effort to understand and appreciate various cultures, specifically, African American culture. As the number of CLD students continue to increase, the predominantly White teacher workforce offers a stark contrast to the diverse student population. Teachers' implicit biases can be triggered by the cultural discrepancy between teachers and students (Rudd, 2014).

Disciplinary Referrals

Research has shown that students who are repeatedly suspended are at a higher risk for lower academic achievement and school dropout (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). Discipline referrals often lead to loss of instructional time. Also, numerous studies have found that African American students are more likely to receive disciplinary referrals than White students (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Gregory et al., 2010; McIntosh et al., 2018; Townsend, 2000).

Teachers' unconscious biases and stereotypes of African American males can be a major contributing factor for the number of disciplinary referrals written.

To expand on this research, Anyon et al., (2018) investigated the relationship between students' race and disciplinary infractions. This study incorporated administrative data from a large urban school district that consisted of 20,166 discipline incidents. Results suggested CLD students were more likely to be disciplined than White students in the classroom setting.

To offer an explanation for disproportionality in discipline referrals, Bryan et al., (2011) examined predictors of English Language Arts and math teachers' referrals to counselors for disruptive behavior. Data were selected from the 2002 national longitudinal data set collected by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The sample included 4,607 tenth grade English students and 4, 981 tenth grade students in math class. In English classes, 66.4% of students were White, and 26% were CLD students and for math class, 65.7% were White, and 27.5% were CLD students. English teacher demographics were 88% White and 8.6% non-majority. Math teachers' demographics were 86.5% White and 6.7% non-majority. Results demonstrated that for English Language Arts teachers, a student's race was a predictor for referrals to counselors for disruptive behaviors. African American students in general were more likely to receive disciplinary referrals to the school counselor by the English Language Arts teacher. The demographics of the English and Math teachers in this study depict the demographics of teachers nationally. The relationship between the White teacher and the CLD student remains a contributing factor to the disproportionality in discipline referrals.

In a similar study, Skiba et al., (2011) explored the relationship between office referrals of students from CLD students and administrative discipline decisions. The participants were taken from data collected by the School-wide Information System (SWIS). A total of 436 schools were

categorized into two levels, elementary (K-6), and middle (6-9). Decisions made from office referrals by administrators were the primary focus of this study. Descriptive and logistic regression analyses showed that African American and Latinx students were more likely to receive discipline referrals and out of school suspensions than their White peers for the same infractions.

Smolkowski et al., (2016) reviewed school discipline referrals from 1,666 elementary schools and 483,686 office referrals to identify situations of disproportionality. The sample of discipline referrals involved 235,542 students and 53,030 educators. Results demonstrated racial and gender disproportionality was prevalent in behaviors which were determined to be subjective behaviors in the classroom. African American students were at a greater risk for classroom disciplinary referrals than their White peers. Findings are consistent with research that suggests some decisions are based on teachers' unconscious biases (Smolkowski, 2016).

School to Prison Pipeline

Over the past 40 years, disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of African American males has been a hot topic for educational researchers. The term school-to-prison pipeline was developed as a result of the documentation of the direct link between exclusionary discipline consequences and the entrance into prison (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Smith (2009) identified the school-to-prison pipeline as a conceptual framework to explain the correlation between policies and practices in the education and justice system that aided the disproportionate thrust of African American males into prison after expulsion from school. In agreement, Kim, (2009) indicated that the school-to-prison pipeline resulted from the failed public education system that does not meet the overall needs of CLD students. Bryan (2017) stated the negative views of African American males contribute to their passage from school to prison. Researchers have identified

lack of academic success in school, excessive suspensions and/or expulsions, and students dropping out of high school as contributing factors in the school-to-prison pipeline (Bell, 2016; Hunter, 2016; Rodriguez-Ruiz, 2017).

Christle et al., (2010) conducted three separate studies to examine school characteristics associated with students' lack of academic success, suspensions, juvenile delinquency and dropping out. Elementary, middle, and high schools were included in these three studies. The first study examined school characteristics associated with student's lack of academic success and the characteristics of low and high academically performing elementary schools. The second study explored school variables linked to suspension rates and the characteristics of middle schools who reported high and low suspension rates. The final study investigated the school variables associated with dropout rates and the different characteristics of high schools who reported high and low dropout rates. Surveys, observations, and interviews were conducted. The authors inspected: (a) school policies and procedures; (b) characteristics, philosophies, attitudes, and behaviors of the administration; (c) characteristics, philosophies, attitudes, and behaviors of staff members; (d) characteristics and behaviors of students; (e) the schools' social and physical environmental setting; and (f) classroom instruction. The first study results yielded a correlation between the percentage of students enrolled in free and reduced lunch and low academic achievement test scores. The second study's findings showed that suspension rates were connected to students who committed violations of the law, had high retention and dropout rates, and were enrolled in free and reduced lunch. The final study results demonstrated secondary schools with high percentages of students with low socioeconomic status also had high dropout rates.

Grace and Nelson, (2014) investigated the perceptions of 11, 16-18-year-old African American males on their K-12 educational experiences. The researchers examined the factors of race and racism during their school experiences. Each participant was expelled from school during their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant and all expressed the weight of being African American and male. The participants expressed a "trying to survive" experience while communicating how teachers' negative views impacted them outside of school. Eight of the participants conveyed that experiences of microaggressions interfered with their ability to connect with the school environment. Eight participants articulated their own behaviors contributed to the low expectations and perceptions teachers had of them, but also the teachers' perceptions of them provided an obstacle to their academic success. Nine of the participants conveyed that teachers saw them as a problem and that race was a major factor in their success, or lack of it, throughout their school experience.

Summary

The previous nine studies in this section provide some validation that the disproportionality of African American students in special education, overrepresentation in disciplinary referrals, and indications of the school-to-prison pipeline add to the negative experiences of these diverse students. Decades of research has shown that African American males are consistently at a significantly higher risk for disciplinary actions (i.e., office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The removal of African American males from school regularly encourages a path to the prison system (Christle et al., 2010). Several factors were noted to contribute to this phenomenon including teachers' characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs towards African American males (Anyon et al., 2018; Bryan et al., 2011; Neal et al., 2003). The

lack of understanding of cultural differences oftentimes cause teachers to write numerous

disciplinary referrals for African American males for minor classroom infractions. To promote

equitable treatment of students from CLD backgrounds and to ensure they are treated with

equity, teachers need to develop knowledge and skills related to culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pedagogy

Educators often overlook culture as a variable to African American students' academic

success. Irvine (1990; 2002; 2003) stated there is a unique and culturally specific teaching style

which contributes to the academic success of African American students. According to Banks

(1977 p. 74),

> Culture consists of behavior patterns, symbols, institutions, values and other human-made
> components of society. It is the unique achievement of a human group, which
> distinguishes that group from other human groups. While cultures are in many ways
> similar, a particular culture constitutes a unique world.

Public school systems often exemplify the White middle-class norms and values in U. S. society.

The infusion of the students' culture in teaching and learning is essential to improving the

students' academic success (Ware, 2006). culturally responsive teaching is based on the belief

that a student's cultural background is essential to the student's academic outcomes (Nieto,

2000). Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as incorporating the students' cultural

familiarity, prior knowledge, frames of reference, and learning styles of students from CLD

backgrounds to make learning opportunities more relevant and effective to and for them. Gay

(2002) suggested that students from CLD backgrounds' academic achievement would improve if

teachers incorporated students' cultural background in classroom instruction.

Gay (2002) has described five principles of the theoretical features of culturally responsive

teaching: caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction.

Caring. Culturally responsive caring encompasses the teacher's expectations and attitudes regarding the intellectual capacities of the learners. According to Gay (2002), a caring teacher includes behaviors that demonstrate commitment to making student learning happen. The author states a genuine caring relationship promotes academic and behavioral success of students from CLD backgrounds.

Communication. Gay (2000) notes cultural communication styles of students from CLD backgrounds reflect cultural values. These values form a student's learning behavior and how teachers can use the styles to accommodate students from CLD backgrounds in the classroom. Teachers should be aware of linguistic differences in various cultures (i.e., African dialect), as well as contextual factors, vocabulary usage, roles of the speaker and listener, hand gestures, nuances, facial expressions, and other body movements of a students' culture.

Curriculum. Teachers' content, materials, and lesson plans reflect the diversity of students in their classrooms. According to Gay (2000), when teachers incorporate culture into the curriculum, it empowers students from CLD backgrounds, enhances participation, and active engagement.

Instruction. Culturally responsive instruction provides learning opportunities designed to promote student knowledge, are student-centered, and focused on long-term gain. Instruction is varied based on the needs of the students from CLD backgrounds in the class. Lessons incorporate the student's cultural background.

Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The overrepresentation of students from CLD backgrounds in special education and the underrepresentation of these students in the gifted program is a contributing factor for the beginning of culturally responsive teaching. Statistics show that although the number of students from CLD backgrounds is increasing, there continues

to be an achievement gap between CLD students and White students. Additionally, there is a demographic divide between students and teachers. Culturally responsive pedagogy expands the literature on Multicultural Education of the early 1990s (Banks, 1994; Delpit, 1995). To be effective, culturally responsive teaching. incorporates the cultural backgrounds, heritages, and orientations of students from CLD backgrounds as resources to improve their educational experiences (Gay, 2002, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Irvine and Armento (2001) described culturally responsive teaching as student-focused, culturally saturated lessons and activities, high expectation, critical analytical skills, and building relationships with students, families, and communities.

Howard (2006) describes seven principles of culturally responsive teaching as: (a) supporting students in their cultural connections; (b) demonstrating cultural care; (c) creating physically and culturally warm classroom environments; (d) supporting students in their academic growth; (e) adapting lessons, and activities to reflect the cultural and learning differences of students; (f) managing our classrooms with restorative disciplinary procedures; and (g) creating opportunities to promote both individuality and collectivity of the students. To determine the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy, Epstein et al. (2011) examined the effects of culturally responsive teaching of African American and Latinx high school students. Twenty-two students participated in the study. The students were enrolled in a humanities class that incorporated history and English by topics and themes. The teacher embodied the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. Qualitative methods were used to analyze the students' responses and derive codes from the teacher's pedagogy. For the African American and Latinx students, the codes included (a) the degree of inclusiveness of selections of racial groups; (b) representation of people of color as historical figures; and (c) representations of Whites as a diverse group.

Findings indicated students appeared to be more interested in the positive roles of African Americans and Latinx in history and were less interested in instruction that showed them as an oppressed group. Additionally, the students were also less interested in instruction about White people's historical experiences.

Similar to Epstein et al.'s (2011) survey study, Scott and White (2013) conducted research on the motivations of 41 African American (19%) and Latinx (74%) girls ages 13-18 who were enrolled in a 2-year culturally responsive multimedia program during an after-school summer program. The program incorporated digital media with culturally relevant content. The authors conducted a comprehensive assessment of the students' journals, focus groups, interviews, document reviews, and observations. The authors argued the component of the program which involved culturally responsive multimedia instruction had a positive impact on the students' desire to continue participating in the program.

In the same year as the previous study, Bui and Fagan (2013), evaluated the effects of an Integrated Reading Comprehensive Strategy (IRCS). The IRCS incorporated three reading comprehension strategies through a culturally responsive framework. The multicultural literature reading program included 49 fifth-grade students from CLD backgrounds. A quasi-experimental nonequivalent group, pretest-posttest research design was employed. To create the two groups for the study, the authors randomly combined half of the first class with half of the second class. The researchers taught grammar instruction, word webs to activate prior knowledge, and prediction strategies with cultural literature incorporated into the lessons of one group. Results indicated statistically significant mean score gains from pretest and posttest scores for both groups. However, the group that received multicultural literature moved from a frustrational level, which requires extensive or moderate assistance from a teacher, to just beyond an

instructional level. The instructional level is the highest level for a reader that is not an independent reader. Students in this level, have knowledge of the given topic, can readily access the text with little or no errors. Data from the pretest and posttest for each group was evaluated to determine the effect of IRCS.

To examine the effects of culturally responsive, computer-based social skills instruction, Robinson-Ervin et al. (2016) studied 6 urban African American sixth graders with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and 6 general education students on social skill acquisition and generalization. The 6 EBD participants received culturally responsive computer-based social skill instruction as an intervention. The intervention consisted of a fusion, packaged computer-based program that included precise social skills instruction which also incorporated face-to-face group practice sessions. The general education students were paired with the EBD students during group practice sessions. However, the general education students did not receive the culturally responsive computer-based intervention. A multi-probe across participants research design was employed for this study. Direct observation data were collected on participants following adult directions during baseline, intervention, and generalization. Data were analyzed to determine the functional relationship between the culturally responsive computer-based social skills intervention and students' ability to follow adult directives. Findings showed the 6 African American students with EBD ability to follow adult directives increased during the intervention phase as opposed to the baseline phase of the study. A large effect size was calculated for both the intervention and generalization. The effect size for the intervention was 0.994 and 0.96 for generalization.

Shumate et al., (2012) examined the academic outcome of five middle school Latinx students with specific learning disabilities who received culturally infused mathematics lessons. The

study utilized an ABACACA multiple treatment reversal design. The students participated in a mathematics lesson for 55-60 minutes. For each lesson, the students took a pretest during the warm-up activity and a posttest at the end of the lesson. The teacher incorporated culturally responsive instruction by explicitly stating the objective at the beginning of the lesson, providing guided notes, incorporating examples that were culturally relevant to the students, and using various instructional strategies and activities. Findings indicated a functional relationship between the increase in students' mathematical performance and the modified culturally responsive mathematics instruction.

Glass (2019) conducted a qualitative methodology to investigate the role of reading culturally relevant texts on six CLD disengaged readers which included one female and five males. Data collection consisted of observations and audio recorded interviews. The students participated in group discussions of a book: *Chess Rumble*. The discussion group met for two 90-minute book groups in a single week to read and discuss the text. Semi-structured informal interviews with students were held before the discussion groups. The interviews were used to establish rapport between the researcher and the students. Findings showed the students were actively engaged during the reading and discussion groups. Each participant had negative experiences during literature discussion groups; however; the allowance by the researcher for students to read texts relevant to their culture provided them with the opportunity to experience worlds similar to their own.

Summary

Research supports the positives of teaching cultural differences and its effects on the learning process for providing responsive instruction (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Chamberlain, 2005; Epstein et al., 2011; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Scott, 2013). Many teachers are inadequately prepared to

teach students' from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds which provides for relevant cultural knowledge, experience, and training (Sobel et al., 2011). The cultural gap between a teacher and students and inadequate preparation can impede effective culturally responsive practices. An educator's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations can have a major impact on student outcomes. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culturally responsive teachers understand the impact culture has on students' academic and behavioral outcomes. Resultantly, it is imperative that teachers incorporate students' culture into their teaching practices to improve the performance of underachieving students of color (Bonner et al., 2018).

Teacher Training on Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

The number of CLD students in the United States education system is growing rapidly. According to Kena et al. (2015), it is projected that 56% of students enrolled in U.S. public schools will be students of color (i.e., African American, Latinx, Asian American, Native American) by 2024. Nearly 82% of the public-school teachers are White. Given the increase in CLD students, all teachers must be culturally responsive to be considered competent educators (Ambe, 2006). After completing teacher preparation programs, many preservice teachers still lack the cultural knowledge, expertise, temperament, and experiences needed to teach CLD students (Gao & Mager, 2011). Teacher preparation programs must take the lead in preparing teacher candidates to work in classrooms with students from CLD backgrounds (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2003: Athanases & Martin, 2006; Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999). Research suggests teachers who are exposed to cross-cultural teacher education preparation are less likely to embrace cultural stereotypes and negative views (Irvine, 2003). Gay (2000; 2002) asserted if teachers make an effort to infuse students' cultures into classroom instruction, the academic achievement of students from CLD backgrounds would

improve. Additional researchers (Ford & Kea, 2009; Saifer et al., 2011; Sharma, 2005) also confirm that teachers must understand, appreciate, and respect the cultural background and differences of each student in order to ensure success. Teachers who utilize quality culturally responsive evidence-based practices -- practices responsive to the emotional, behavioral, and social needs of CLD students with disabilities in diverse schools -- are needed in the field of special education (Kea et al., 2006).

This strand will discuss both preservice and inservice teacher training on culturally responsive teaching, as well as teacher, student, and parent perceptions on cultural responsiveness and its effect on cultural competence and student outcomes. Training teacher educators is essential in helping them to understand what cultural responsiveness means and looks like in the classroom. Culturally responsive teachers understand that culture and language shape the thinking process of individual students and influences the beliefs, principles, and behaviors that both students and teachers bring to the classroom (Gay, 2002).

Preservice and Inservice Teacher Preparation and Training

Preservice Training

During formal teaching preparation preservice programs, a teacher's beliefs are more prone to change (Milner, 2010). It is a time when preservice teachers can be confronted with their implicit biases about cultural diversity (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Teacher education preparation programs are avenues to ensure teachers confront, acknowledge, reflect and challenge their own beliefs about cultural diversity in education. Research shows teachers who engage in culturally responsive practices are more self-assured and believe they are effective in their instruction of CLD students (Williams et al., 2019). There is a dire need for teacher education programs to offer various multicultural experiences to preservice teachers. Currently, the teacher preparation

programs at higher learning institutions are seemingly not preparing teachers to embrace

culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002). Limited courses on diversity are offered in

educational preparation programs and licensure requirements contain isolated coursework

pertaining to cultural responsiveness (Kea, Trent & Davis, 2002). There is a need to initiate

culturally responsive instructional programs in higher education preservice programs (Cadiero-

Kaplan & Rodriguez, 2008).

To investigate the impact of culturally responsive training on self-advocacy, Frye et al.,

(2010) conducted a study involving 55 participants; 32 undergraduate students and 23 graduate

teacher candidates. The study analyzed how teacher candidates currently practicing teaching in

elementary classrooms helped bridge the gap between understanding student cultures and

becoming culturally responsive. The participants were administered an adapted version of The

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self Efficacy and The Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcome

Expectancies Scales (Siwatu, 2007). This self-assessment survey was used as pre- and post-

measures of culturally responsive teaching competencies. The preservice teachers then rated

themselves at the beginning of the program and listed the knowledge and strategies they wanted

to gain during the semester. The preservice teachers evaluated themselves using the same survey

at the end of the semester. The participants gained knowledge and skills through literacy method

course lessons, activities, and strategies on cultural responsiveness. Findings indicated preservice

teachers developed a better understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and believed they

gained the knowledge and skills to implement it in their classrooms. Several common themes

emerged from the feedback provided by the teacher candidates: (a) importance of connecting

other cultures in lessons, (b) examining similarities and differences in everyone, (c) infusing

culturally responsive teaching into content areas, (d) incorporating CRT into future lessons and

teaching, (e) appreciating other's culture and background, and (f) being aware of the needs of students.

A similar study conducted by Fitchett et al. (2012) investigated a social studies method's course the relationship between culturally responsive teaching and teacher candidates' perception of their ability to implement CRT. The authors designed a thorough CRT model within a secondary social studies methods course titled, Review, Reflect, and React (3Rs). In the first phase, *Review*, teacher candidates reviewed their courses and asked questions (a) who is represented within the curriculum, (b) who is marginalized, and in what capacity (Marri, 2005). During the second phase, *Reflect*, teacher candidates interviewed students in their classroom in an attempt to better understand the cultural context of the class and conducted observations of their cooperating teacher's engagement of diverse learners within the class (Gay & Kirland, 2003). In the final phase, *React*, teacher candidates created culturally relevant lesson plans and taught the lessons to their students. In addition to the three phases, teacher candidates wrote journal reflections on their teaching experiences. Twenty teacher candidates in a middle-secondary (6-12) social studies methods course participated in the study. Participants in this study were teacher candidates of a graduate licensure program for graduate students to receive their social studies teaching credentials. Findings indicated teacher candidates expressed confidence in their ability to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices after being exposed to a comprehensive culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Participants also stated increased preparedness to work with students from CLD backgrounds.

An additional study conducted by Gere et al. (2009) analyzed preservice teachers' race consciousness (feeling a sense of obligation for one's race) and how it influences understanding of cultural responsiveness. Preservice teachers participated in a semester-long study group

session that focused on students' cultures and the challenges faced by schools with large populations of students from CLD backgrounds. During the second semester, preservice teachers enrolled in a schooling and society course. In this course, preservice teachers were taught concepts essential to cultural responsiveness. The study included preservice teachers, 12 white and 3 from CLD backgrounds. Data were collected from various sources such as, program applications, student journal entries, audiotapes, and detailed field notes from 14 three-hour class sessions, written assignments, and interviews with four focal preservice teachers. Two out of four preservice teachers were chosen for a case study; one was White, and one was from a CLD background. Four themes emerged from the study preservice teachers race consciousness: (a) emergence during classroom interactions and interviews, (b) allowing preservice teachers to see how others perceived them as a result of their race, (c) shaping preservice teachers' responses to assignments; and (d) shaping students' processing of cultural responsiveness.

Most of the participants in the study agreed to the philosophy surrounding the benefits of preservice and inservice training on CRT and understanding and appreciating others' backgrounds is a key to positive student outcomes. Studies by Frye et al., (2010), Fitchett et al., (2012), and Gere et al. (2009) support these findings. The authors determined preservice and inservice teachers who are exposed to culturally responsive pedagogy had more confidence to work with students from various cultures. Although none of these studies address special education training preparation programs, they highlight the impact culturally responsive training has on the effectiveness of the teacher educators.

Similarly, Kea et al. (2002) conducted a study to explore teachers' limited knowledge about CLD students with and without disabilities. The study included 43 African American preservice teachers. Three surveys were administered to the participants. All three surveys focused on the

preservice teachers' perceived preparedness to teach students from CLD backgrounds with and without disabilities. The first survey, The Multicultural Knowledge and Teaching Survey (Wayson & Moultry, 1988) contained demographic information in addition to, the teachers' preparedness to teach students from CLD backgrounds. The second survey, Multicultural Teaching Scale (Wayson, 1988), identified fundamental skills needed to teach students from CLD backgrounds. The third instrument, the Survey of Contributions to American Society by Various Ethnic Groups (Joronek,1992), evaluated the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity and teaching. Findings showed 80% (n=34) of the preservice teachers believed they were highly skilled to teach students from CLD backgrounds. Many of the preservice teachers felt more comfortable with teaching students from CLD backgrounds and knew more about their cultural background. However, none of the preservice teachers chose the "very much prepared" category on the survey (which is the highest possible rating) for their teacher education program ability to educate them to teach students from CLD backgrounds with disabilities. All preservice teachers expressed that more course preparation was needed in the areas of human growth and on cultural diversity historical knowledge.

Inservice Training

In addition to preservice training, Wiggins and McTighe (2006) stated professional development plays a vital role in the ongoing growth of standard practice and professionalism for educators. Salend (2008) supports and expands upon this notion by arguing that ongoing, structured professional development is crucial to the development and implementation of inclusive, responsive classrooms. To guarantee the academic achievement of diverse learners, institutions of higher education and school districts must support beginning and experienced teachers in their knowledge, skills, and ability to implement culturally responsive teaching

practices through comprehensive and ongoing professional development (Gringer & Stewart, 2012). In a national representative sample of 641 new P-12 grade teachers, 63% indicated they needed more training on how to teach students from CLD backgrounds (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, 2008).

There is a need for sustained professional development designed to promote critical consciousness and multicultural understanding in teacher education (Aujla-Bhullar, 2011). Affolter (2017) examined the impact of a culturally responsive intervention provided for teachers and school leaders, in a K-5 elementary setting, through professional development. This study was based on the critical race theory and critical ethnographic framework. A 5-month long professional development intervention called the Culturally Responsive Professional Development (CRPD) series was employed in this study. Surveys and individual interviews were conducted. The CRPD involved five components: (a) teacher buy-in; (b) content, knowledge, and skill building concerning culturally responsive teaching; (c) teachers' engagement in an intensive process of self-study; (d) collaboration and flexibility; and (e) building and sustaining culturally responsive practices schoolwide. Participants included 23 K-5 classroom teachers. Three surveys were administered over the course of professional development to get an understanding of how participants' views of cultural responsiveness changed over time. Major findings were organized by (a) what participants learned, (b) support still needed, and (c) school-wide culturally responsive strengths and barriers. Interviews showed participants gained (a) culturally responsive tools and strategies, (b) comfort during uncomfortable situations and conversations, and (c) increased self-awareness pertaining to cultural responsiveness.

A second study related to professional development covering cultural responsiveness was conducted by Brown and Crippen (2017) who examined science teachers' knowledge and

practices of the pursuit of cultural responsiveness during the Science Teachers Are Responsive to Students (STARTS) program. The STARTS program, a 6-month professional development to promote cultural responsiveness, was designed to assist high school science teachers in integrating culturally responsive science teaching practices into their classrooms. Lessons and activities that included their students' cultural identities were infused in academically rigorous instructional materials. The program comprised of six major activities; (a) lesson study, (b) growing awareness inventory, (c) curriculum topic study, (d) professional growth tasks, (e) Saturday collaboration sessions, and (f) culturally responsive science units. Each activity was delivered in a blended learning environment.

Participants included six life science teachers from five different high schools. Classroom observations, one-on-one interviews and program artifacts were used for data analysis. The findings indicated participants, over time, showed encouraging changes in their culturally responsive understandings of students from CLD backgrounds. Teachers' stereotypical views of students changed based on their direct experiences; hence, discussions of students' capabilities took a more positive spin. The role of teachers is forefront for examining how effective culturally responsive teaching is implemented; however, it is not always feasible for teachers to engage in dialogue or self-reflection. Professional development is a strong avenue for teachers to gain knowledge around issues of diversity.

Research on the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of teachers towards CLD students is essential to shaping the teachers' conceptions and actions (Gay, 2010). Additionally, the viewpoint of students themselves is seldom heard in research concerning teacher practices. Howard (2002; cited by Hubert, 2014) described the absence of the voices of African American students as footsteps in the dark because no one is listening and the footsteps allow insight into

personal experiences. It is also imperative to gain the perspective of families, as they are vital to the dynamics of the students' cultural background.

Perceptions of Teachers and Students/Families

Based on research findings, teachers feel inadequately prepared for culturally responsive teaching practices (Karatas & Oral, 2015; Kea et al., 2002; Sharma, 2011). Personal hesitations, insufficient training in teacher preparation programs, and resistance from schools are some of the reasons listed. According to Roux (2001), knowledge, manners, considerations, and teacher behaviors about culturally responsive practices, determine the success of culturally responsive education. It is common for students from CLD background and their teachers to live in different worlds, and often not understand or appreciate each other's cultural differences. Nieto (2005) presented five attitudinal qualities teachers should have to be effective culturally responsive teachers: (a) commitment to teaching culturally and linguistically diverse student; (b) empathy and value of students cultural backgrounds; (c) challenge mainstream knowledge, traditional ways of doing things, and perceptions of students from CLD backgrounds, families, cultures, and communities; (d) willingness to adapt to the diversity of the students in their classroom; and (e) desire for social justice and equality. Research on understanding teachers' and students'/families' perceptions of cultural responsiveness can help support teachers and students of diverse backgrounds.

Teacher Perceptions

A number of scholars have conducted research on teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and outlook concerning students of color. Research based on teachers' beliefs regarding racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is rapidly increasing. Recent studies conducted by Heitner and Jennings, (2016), Brown and Crippen (2017), Samuel et al. (2017), and Gaias et al. (2019) are illustrative

of this trend. A teacher's ability to use effective culturally responsive teaching practices paired with their temperament and/or beliefs have a great impact on their teaching of students from CLD backgrounds. Preservice teachers who are exposed to culturally responsive teaching preparation, are less likely to embrace negative views about a student's lack of achievement based of their culture (Gay, 2010).

Several studies exist that explore teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. Karatas and Oral (2015) examined 25 new teachers' (from various disciplines) perceptions about culturally responsive education. The qualitative research case study included a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire. According to the findings, the participants believed teacher education programs should incorporate cultural diversity. Most of the participants in the study felt they did not have enough self-sufficiency to provide culturally responsive education.

Sharma (2011) investigated teacher perceptions of cross-cultural education and their professional preparation to teach students from CLD backgrounds. This descriptive study, combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. A total of 150 K-12 teachers completed a survey and 15 teachers (5 high school teachers, 5 middle school teachers, and 5 elementary school teachers) participated in interviews. Respondents expressed concern about the need for training and experiences in culturally responsive practices in classrooms with students from CLD backgrounds. A significantly low correlation between teachers' demographics and their perceptions was found using correlation coefficients and ANOVA results. Findings from this study along with previous research indicates a need for effective teacher preparation in multicultural education for teachers who teach students from culturally CLD backgrounds.

The following studies explored how teachers' attitudes or perceptions changed after receiving coursework in culturally responsive teaching. Gao and Mager (2011) investigated

through course preparation, the relationship between how preservice teachers perceived their sense of efficacy and attitudes toward diversity in schools. Participants included 168 preservice teachers enrolled in a dual-certification inclusive teacher education program designed to teach preservice teachers how to teach both regular and special education students. Qualitative research was employed. For data collection, preservice teachers presented a portfolio which included lesson plans. Participants completed four separate questionnaires (a) demographics, (b) sense of teacher efficacy, (c) attitudes towards inclusive education, and (d) beliefs about diversity. The program incorporated issues on diversity into all of the coursework and field experiences for preservice teachers. The mission was to develop preservice teachers into culturally competent inclusive educators. Findings revealed preservice teachers who participated in this multicultural teacher preparation program showed confidence in their teacher ability, positive attitudes towards inclusive education, as well as favorable views of diversity. Participants' General Teacher Efficacy (GTE) learning experiences were related to their general confidence as a teacher and its effect on student learning, whereas their Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE) represents teachers' beliefs in their personal impact on student learning. All participants showed an increase across the course of preparation. PTE and GTE displayed different developmental patterns. GTE was believed to be more context-dependent and PTE is more individual-based. Overall findings indicate preservice teachers showed positive teacher efficiency, encouraging attitudes towards inclusive education, and optimistic beliefs about diversity.

In another study, Phuntsog (2001) examined teachers' perceptions of the importance of culturally responsive teaching in an elementary school. The participants were chosen from a purposive sampling procedure. Cross-cultural/Language Academic Development or Bilingual

Cross-Cultural Language Academic Development (CLAD/BCLAD) certified teachers were selected to participate. The CLAD/BCLAD program was created to help teachers develop skills, knowledge and attitudes to teach CLD students. The study included 33 teachers. Twenty-three of the teachers were enrolled in a Master's of Education summer program. Of the 23 teachers, 13 were CLAD certified and 10 were in the process of obtaining their certification. The participants completed a four-point Likert-type scale. Findings demonstrated that 96% (n=32) of the participants identified the importance of cultural responsiveness when working with students from CLD backgrounds. The majority of the participants 61% (n=20) strongly agreed that all children can learn and teachers have a responsibility to help eliminate discrimination and prejudice in our society against various ethnic groups. A repeated suggestion from participants was to make multicultural courses mandatory for all prospective teachers.

Another study pertaining to preservice teachers' cultural responsiveness was conducted by Bleicher (2011) who conducted a three-year study examining the effects of a one-week intensive urban field placement of 95 teacher candidates. A quantitative and qualitative research design was employed. The participants completed a pre-post survey before and after their urban field experience. The participants also composed a written reflective assignment. The teacher education preparation course, required for the field experience, incorporated views of social justice, reflective practices, and culturally responsive teaching. Diversity and inclusion were infused throughout the education program curriculum. Prior to the urban education field experience, the participants were given extensive course work in cultural language, literacy differences and tutoring experiences in schools with a majority population of students from CLD backgrounds. The participants were also assigned a mentor in the school where they conducted their field experience. After completion of the urban field experience, the participants were

required to write guided observations which include observations in other cities and towns nearby to learn desired and exemplary practices from educators, and create reflection essays that incorporated their experience in the urban school. Despite the extensive instruction that was received from the teacher preparation program prior to the urban field experience, teacher candidates' pre-experience survey results indicated they expected to encounter students who were: (a) academically underperforming, (b) apathetic, (c) disrespectful, (d) undisciplined, and (e) truant during their clinical experience. Findings from this study show the strategic placement of teacher candidates in urban field experience setting can produce teachers who are culturally responsive, as well as, cultivate a heightened willingness to teach students from CLD backgrounds.

Teachers' beliefs have a significant impact on the students they teach. In the studies mentioned, most of the findings indicated teachers believed they were inadequately prepared to teach students from CLD backgrounds (Karatas & Oral, 2015; Kea et al., 2002; Sharma, 2011). Gay (2010) stated many potential teachers do not delve deeply into their own attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of cultural diversity. Research on preservice and inservice teachers' positive perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs on diversity is essential to educational practices and policy reforms as it pertains to CLD students.

Student Perceptions

A plethora of research has been conducted to examine the perceptions of educators and professionals in the field of education pertaining to culturally responsive teaching; however, only a limited number of studies have attempted to examine student perspectives of effective teaching and classroom climates (Anderson & Young, 1992; Garcia, 1992; Miron & Lauria, 1998).

Therefore, it is essential that students are empowered and their voices are heard, as they are essential members of successful culturally responsive teaching practices.

To make sure the perceptions of students received validation, Howard (2001) assessed African American elementary student perceptions of culturally relevant practices using qualitative methods. The participants included 17 African American elementary students; 10 girls and 7 boys from four elementary schools. The study employed a qualitative research design. Data were collected through student observations in their classroom and interviews. Each student participated in a one-on-one interview as well as a focus group session with classmates. Three key findings of student preferences emerged from this qualitative study. Teachers who exhibited culturally responsive pedagogy: (1) demonstrated cultural caring and built relationships with students, (2) had classrooms that resembled community and family-type environments, and (3) made learning fun and entertaining. Student responses suggested culturally relevant teaching strategies positively affected students' efforts and classroom engagement.

Another study conducted by Howard (2002) examined 30 African American elementary and secondary, 2nd to 8th grade students, 17 girls and 13 boys, experiences of teaching practices and learning environments. Researchers conducted semi-structured individual interviews and focus group sessions using a qualitative design. Each participant was interviewed individually and additionally in focus group sessions. The focus group sessions consisted of two or three selected participants from this study. Results showed teachers who students believed demonstrated teacher effectiveness: (a) established an environment that mirrored a family, community, and home-like setting; (b) had culturally connected caring relationships with students; and (c) used of specific types of verbal statements and confirmation.

Finally, Hughes et al. (2011) examined the perceptions of 16 special education students 10 males and 6 females, in Grades 5-7, ages 10-13, on the cultural dynamics of their school and the teachers' cultural responsiveness to diversity. The students were enrolled in a low-economic, ethnically diverse English Language Learner-cluster middle school. The students participated in a pullout resource class and had other classes in the general education setting. The participants included six African American, five Latinx, three White, one Asian, and one Native American. Thirteen students were identified as learning disabled, one with a speech impairment and two were labeled as other health impairment. Each of the students completed a survey consisting of 22 questions, along with open-ended questions pertaining to their demographic background. The students completed the questionnaires during their resource room reading classes. Descriptive statistics were applied for this study. Responses from 56% of the students indicated agreement with the following indicators of culturally responsive teaching; (a) teachers' teaching styles matched students' learning, (b) classmates' cultures were highlighted in lessons, and (c) materials and activities incorporated various cultures. However, half of the students disagreed with these indicators or stated they only occurred occasionally. The majority of the students overwhelmingly responded their race and culture were not recognized by teachers.

Family Perceptions

In addition to exploring student perceptions, perspectives of parents and families play an important role. Parents' participation in education has been a subject of interest for many years. Several studies have indicated parental involvement is intertwined with student success in school (Daniel et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2016; Hirano & Rowe, 2018; Singh et al., 2004). There has been an increased interest in the topic of parental involvement and perceptions in special education

over the years; however, studies which include the parent's perception of teachers' cultural competence is lacking.

One study involved an examination of parent perceptions of teacher cultural competence. Weekes and Nelson (2018) investigated the perceptions of the parents of African American males in special education and perceptions of the role of educators' cultural competency as identified by the parents. Participants included 10 parents of fourth- and fifth-grade African American students with disabilities. A qualitative case study was utilized which also incorporated semi-structured interviews with questions such as, "Do you feel that the curriculum is biased towards anyone's culture? If so, please explain what impact you think that has had on your child's education." "Racial micro-aggressions are brief verbal, behavioral, or environmental humiliations that communicate hostility, derogatory, denigrating, and hurtful messages to people of color. Can you think of a time that you felt that your child experienced this from a teacher that was of a different ethnic background than yours? If so, please give me an example" (p. 62). The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually and each participant answered eleven open-ended questions. Sixty minutes were allotted for each interview. Participants indicated awareness of research indicating overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Participants also identified behavior as the biggest indicator for African American males' referral for special education services. Institutional racism was perceived to be an issue in the school system according to the participants. Participants also expressed their belief that educators who formed positive relationships with their students helped them to have positive attitudes towards their abilities and school experiences.

Summary

Based on the studies reviewed, preservice teachers expressed a willingness to be more culturally responsive in their teaching practices (Fitchett et al., 2012; Fryer et al., 2010; Gere et al., 2009). It was noted that there is a divide between inservice teachers' beliefs and their behaviors regarding culturally responsive teaching (Affolter, 2017; Brown & Crippen, 2017; Milner, 2010). Preservice teachers who participated in culturally responsive coursework showed positive teacher efficacy, positive beliefs of diversity and favorable attitudes towards inclusive education (Geo & Mager, 2011; Karatas & Oral, 2015; Kea et al., 2002; Siwatu, 2011). Students/families suggested culturally relevant teaching strategies positively affected students' effort and classroom engagement (Howard, 2001; 2002; Weekes, & Nelson, 2018). Teacher preparation programs, and teachers must recognize that problems related to teaching cultural diversity cannot be resolved until they acknowledge and confront the causes and characteristics of the underachievement of students of color and create and implement strategies to rectify this issue (Gay, 2010).

Summary of Literature Review

Overrepresentation of African American males in special education has been an ongoing issue for several decades. African American males are disproportionately represented in high incidence categories such as learning disabled, other health impairment, and seriously emotionally disabled (Ahram et al., 2011; Dever et al., 2016; Harber et al., 2012; Lott-Daley, 2013; Woodson & Harris, 2018; Zhang, 2012). Students from CLD backgrounds, specifically African American males, are also overrepresented in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. (Anyon et al., 2018, Bryan et al., 2011; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Skiba et al., 2011; Smolkowski et al., 2016). However, this same group tend to be underrepresented in the gifted category (Ford, 2010). Research shows the

contrast of the demographics of White female teachers, and their students is cause for concern (Prater & Devereaux, 2009). A students' race, ethnicity, and cultural background significantly impacts their academic achievement and social behavior (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). Too many teachers are unprepared to teach CLD students. It is critical for teacher education programs to do a better job at training future teachers since preparation is a major influence in resolving the problem of underachievement of students from CLD backgrounds. The knowledge that teachers need to have about cultural responsiveness to diversity is much deeper than the basic knowledge of awareness of different cultures. Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions must reflect an awareness, understanding and acceptance of the cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of their student (Sparks, 1994).

Scholars have shown culturally responsive teaching is critical to the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Ford, 2010; Gay, 2000; 2010; Harmon, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2010). Researchers (Boykin, et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2001; 2010; Willis, 2003) confirm that African American students thrive in an environment that is culturally relevant and personal to their learning. According to the aforementioned studies, there is a correlation between students' from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds academic achievement and culturally relevant teaching practice (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Robinson-Ervin et al., 2016; Scott, 2013; Shumate et al., 2012). Although extensive research has been done on teacher perceptions of culturally responsive teaching, little has been done to examine the student perception on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Therefore, more research is needed on the students,' specifically African American males', perception of culturally responsive teaching at the

secondary level. Further research can solidify the connection between African American males'

achievement and culturally responsive teaching.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school African American males, receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenge, on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. This chapter includes an inclusive, comprehensive explanation of the methodology selected for this study. Information was provided on the (a) participants and participant selection process, (b) research setting and design, and (c) description of data collection and analysis.

Research Questions

1. How do high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity?

2. From the perspective of African America male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom?

Qualitative Research

Creswell (2013) expressed that the main focus of qualitative research was to evaluate and comprehend the perceptions, experiences, and actions of people. This qualitative study attempted to develop an understanding the perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education or at risk for academic on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Qualitative research is defined as, "primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among categories" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 479). Based on this definition, qualitative research allows for the research and data to originate naturally. The essential focus of qualitative research is to give the researcher a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The purpose of this phenomenological

study was to examine the lived experiences and to describe the perceptions on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. This study anticipated ten students to participate in two focus group sessions. Five participants in each session.

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of research participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology uses participants' actual words to share their experiences, which is a useful application when examining a construct such as cultural diversity. Based on the statements provided by participants, the researcher developed a list of meaningful statements, grouped the meaningful statements into larger components of information, created a description of how the experience happened, and concluded with a complex account of the phenomenon. As Merriam and Tisdell, (2015) stated, by using a phenomenological lens, a researcher can investigate "…how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 24). The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to explore the thoughts, feelings, and reflections of the participants to gain in-depth insights on the experiences of African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges in general education settings. It is imperative to provide a safe place for high school African American males to express in detail their experiences with teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. A phenomenological qualitative study allowed for this.

A small sample size was utilized by researchers who used phenomenology research to obtain copious and unhindered dialogue which focuses on storied experiences (Bonner, 2001). A phenomenology study aligned with this work as it allowed the researcher to thoroughly examine African American male experiences with their teacher and cultural diversity in the classroom.

Rodriguez et al. (2011) suggested focus group sessions should be considered from a culturally responsive perspective. Culturally responsive focus group sessions are grounded in the critical race theory. This allows the researcher to conduct research by addressing racism which is embedded in society (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Culturally responsive focus group sessions incorporate culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2011). A culturally responsive facilitator is conscious of the physical environment of the focus group session, along with the participants cultural background and communication skills. The facilitator's goal is to create a culturally natural and affirming environment for the participants and value the story being shared. In dealing with the context of high schools, Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified six aspects of a culturally responsive teacher. Rodriguez et al. (2011) constructed six parallel components which describe the culturally responsive researcher. The culturally responsive researcher: (a) is socially conscious; (b) recognizes participants' perspectives and stories; (c) sees self as a change agent to create a warming environment; (d) is aware of participants' social identities; (e) is reflexive about researcher's own cultural background and how it impacts the research experience; and (f) use participant's story to enhance participant's ability to coproduce knowledge within the research setting.

Focus groups were conducted in qualitative research to gain insight into students' viewpoints that are rarely revealed in the research about teaching African American males. According to Gall et al., (2015), the following steps were included while conducting the focus group sessions:

1. Define the objectives.

2. Select the sample.

3. Design the format for interview questions.

4. Pretest the questions.

5. Pre-contact the sample group.

6. Contact the sample group with official time and location.

7. Follow-up with participants, if necessary.

8. Analyze data.

   In a review of the research on instructional practices of teachers of African American students, Scherer et al., (2016) noted limited research has been conducted to examine student perceptions of instructional practices and overall classroom environments. They argued that it is imperative to understand how students exist and interact within their educational communities. Understanding these connections may be more useful than the perceptions of those who are outsider observers. This current study sought to tighten the gap in the literature about the relevance of culture to the academic success of African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. The study also restated how culturally responsive teaching affected the academic success of high school African American males in educational settings.

Participants

   This exploratory study conducted focus groups to examine the perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Participants were identified through purposeful sampling as a method of selecting participants. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research. "Purposeful sampling will allow the researcher to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 204). African American male students were purposely selected for this study because of the overrepresentation of these students in special education referrals, disciplinary infractions in the

classrooms, in- and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school-to-prison pipeline (Banks & Gibson, 2019; Cartledge & Dukes, 2008; Green et al., 2005; Proctor et al., 2012). Participants were asked to share their perceptions of special education or regular education teachers' responsiveness to cultural diversity.

Participants were in their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school, and receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. Students' ages ranged from 15 to 18 years old. Participants were nominated by their teacher. Eligibility was based on the following criteria. Students: (a) were identified by the school system as at risk for academic challenges or receiving special education services, (b) self-identify as African American male, (c) were classified as a high school sophomore, junior, or senior, and (d) received instructional services in at least one class in the general classroom setting. Based on the teacher nominations, the parents were contacted by the researcher to express an interest in their child participation in the study.

In the initial email, participants were asked if they would like to participate in a focus group session. The focus group sessions happened over a two-day period. The first day was comprised of four participants, and the next day were the remaining three participants. Collectively, seven participants, in total, participated in the two focus group sessions. Participants were in their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school, and were receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, defined as learning difficulties, underachievement, grade retention, course failure, personal relationship problems, and/or emotional and behavioral challenges.

Setting

This current study was implemented in a mid-sized, urban, Southeastern school district. During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 32 public schools with 8,837 teachers, serving 18,446 students. The school district's minority enrollment (majority African American) is 64.3%

of the student body. This is more than the state's public-school average of 52% (majority African American). There are 2,655 students with IEPs. The student: teacher ratio of 15:1 is less than the state's public-school average of 16:1. The school district has 72% of students on free or reduced lunch. Two high schools in this district participated in this study. The demographic breakdown of each high school is included. The average number of students at High School A (HSA) is 530. The minority enrollment (majority African American) of HSA is 98% of the study body, which is higher than the North Carolina average of 52%. The racial breakdown for HSA school is African American (92%), Hispanic (4%), White (2%), and Two or more races (2%). At HSA, 96% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Test scores in HSA are in the bottom 50% of all public schools in state. The average number of students at High School B (HSB) is 1,097. The minority enrollment of HSB is 72% which is higher than the state's average of 52%. The racial breakdown of HSB consists of African American (37%), Hispanic (32%), White (28%), and Two or more races (3%). At HSB, 98% of the student body has free or reduced lunch. Test scores at HSB is in the bottom 50% of all the state's public schools.

This study was fully vetted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Once approved, an email was sent to the school administrator with a letter explaining the research project. Schools were chosen based on the percent of (a) students receiving special education services; (b) African American males receiving services in the special education program; and (c) students receiving free and reduced lunch. All parts of the research took place online. Results were reported to the researcher's dissertation committee and will be presented for publication.

Procedures

A qualitative research design was used to obtain the perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on

teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Virtual focus group interviews were conducted using

a semi-structured interview format. The interviewer asked follow-up questions as necessary to

elicit additional information from participants. Since issues arise naturally during the course of

the dialogue, a semi-standard interview protocol was useful to help provide a deeper analysis of

the data (Creswell, 2017). The rationale for using interviews was to present meaningful

interpretations through students' in-depth narratives. Virtual small focus groups were conducted

for 45 minutes to one hour. The virtual focus groups were conducted on two different days at

different times. Each student only attended one focus group session (the 7 students were divided

into two groups). The virtual focus groups took place via Zoom after school so the participants'

instructional time was not disrupted. Demographic data were collected prior to beginning the

virtual focus groups. The students completed a Google form with demographic questions.

Parental consent and student assent were obtained prior to the virtual focus group sessions. The

consent form was sent to the parents via UNC Charlotte DocuSign. The parents signed the UNC

Charlotte DocuSign and returned it electronically to the researcher. The same process was

followed for the student assent form. When the student expressed an interest in participating in

the study, the researcher sent the assent form via UNC Charlotte DocuSign. Once the assent form

was signed by the student, it was returned to the researcher electronically.

Due to the UNC Charlotte Covid-19 and study location restrictions, the focus group session

was conducted via Zoom; an innovative videoconferencing platform. Zoom is a tool for

collection of qualitative data because of its relative ease to use, data management features and

security options. Cameras were turned off during the virtual focus group session. An external

device was used to record the virtual focus group sessions.

Recruitment

Participants were enlisted by sending a recruitment email to district administrators/school principals. Participants were recruited through three steps. First, district administrators/school principals were contacted and asked to send the recruitment email to special and regular education teachers who taught African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. Secondly, to obtain a purposeful sample, teachers were asked to send a recruitment email to the parents of African American males in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grade who were receiving special education services or at-risk for academic challenges, and receiving instruction, in at least one class, in the general education classroom setting. The teacher was involved in recruitment only as a means to distribute the recruitment email. Parents had the option to respond by email or phone call. If parents responded by phone, the recruitment email (that described the study) was used as the basis/foundation for the phone conversation with the parent. The purpose of the conversation was to answer any questions parents had about the study. Once the parents responded to the recruitment email, all communications between the researcher and parents were through phone or email correspondence. The recruitment process began with the parent but once the parent agreed for their child to participate in the study, the researcher initiated recruitment with the child. The researcher obtained the student's email address and phone number from the parent. The researcher contacted the student by telephone. The recruitment email script was used as the foundation for the phone conversation with the student. The purpose of the conversation was to answer any questions the students had about the study. The conversation began with the content from the recruitment email as it described the study and was used as a guide for the phone conversations. This process was conducted numerous times to allow for the allotted number of participants. Participants were informed that all involvement in this study was voluntary and could be aborted at any time. If at any time a participant felt

uncomfortable or unable to answer a question, they had the opportunity to decline to answer or

and withdraw from the focus group session. Participants were assigned participant numbers to

help safeguard identities, and their names were not used at any time throughout this study. Each

student received a participant number prior to the Zoom meeting. When answering a question,

they first identified their participant number before speaking (i.e., Participant 1). To ensure

anonymity, the video cameras were turned off during the Zoom meeting, so the participants were

not able to see each other. The participants given pseudonyms that will be used in any

publications that result from this study. It was anticipated ten African American male students

would participate in the virtual focus group session; however, only seven African American

males participated in this study. The small sample size allowed for an open dialogue amongst the

participants of shared experiences and permitted the researcher to identify common themes

(Creswell, 2013). To ensure the participants met the criteria for this study, participants answered

the following demographic questions: (a) did your parent consent to this study, (b) do you self-

identity as an African American male, (c) are you a high school sophomore, junior, or senior, (d)

are you receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, and (e) are you

receiving instruction in the general education setting in at least one of your classes. If the

participants did not meet the inclusion criteria, they were sent to a thank you email that indicated

an appreciation for their willingness to participate in this study. Participants who met the criteria

were provided the informed assent/consent document.

Data Collection

    Data collection for this study included semi-structured focus groups. The semi-structured

interview format allowed the participants and researcher to openly engage in conversation that

allowed the participants to share their views without fear of repercussions (Creswell, 2013).

Open-ended questions allowed the participants the opportunity to express their beliefs, opinions, and attitudes related to the research questions employed. The researcher acted as a facilitator while the participants were encouraged to share their experiences related to the topics associated with the phenomenon. Follow-up questions were used as needed. If follow-up interviews were necessary after the focus group sessions, they were conducted over the phone or via Zoom. All answers were audio-recorded

Data Analysis

Data analysis content using theoretical and research findings to guide reasoning was used. The researcher had the audio tapes professionally transcribed by TranscribeMe.com. To ensure protection for the participants' identity, the researcher provided pseudonyms (assigned participant numbers) that were used during the focus group sessions, for each participant. The audio-recordings were uploaded through a secure link and transcribed verbatim. Miles et al. (2014) stated coding could be done in a two-step process. In the first cycle, the first step in the data analysis of the focus groups sessions involved descriptive coding. Saldana (2015) suggested coding was an effective method when researching students because students' words were seldom heard, and "coding with their actual words enhanced and deepened adult understanding of their culture and worldviews" (p. 74). During the first cycle, the researcher read each line of the transcription to identify salient words and phrases. During the second cycle, the researcher identified patterns and thematic categories, color coded, and listed and time stamped for auditing purposes. The primary themes that emerged from the data were highlighted in various colors to aid in data presentation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To provide trustworthiness of the data, the researcher and a PhD doctoral candidate reviewed the focus group transcriptions and developed themes. The coders analyzed the transcripts independently and noted how participants' quotes fit

within the established themes and compared coding results (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Four themes emerged using this coding method.

Data Storage

Each participant was given a pseudonym which allowed their real identity not to be divulged. This ensured and maintained confidentiality throughout the research process and afterwards. The participants were informed that their assigned pseudonym needed to be used during the entire focus group session. The researcher also referred to each participant by their pseudonym. Data storage and focus group participants' demographics were stored on a secured password-protected campus computer. Hard copies (analytical notes) were obtained and were stored in the researcher's password-protected Google Drive account. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, access was only provided to the researcher and the researcher's committee chairperson. The researcher was the only one responsible for collecting and storing data for this study; however, the researcher's chairperson also had access, if needed. Digital recordings were stored in the researcher's password-protected Google Drive account. Once the digital recordings were transferred to Google Drive, the original recordings were permanently deleted from the original recorder. All data will be stored for a period of five years.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and authenticity dimensions address the rigor, reliability and validity of the study (Amankwaa, 2016). To certify this study as ethical and thorough, trustworthiness and authenticity were employed. Trustworthiness is defined as "research validity" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37). A trustworthy student "conforms to standards for acceptable and competent practice" and "meets standards for ethical conduct and sensitivity to the politics of the topic and setting," (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 63). To ensure the findings of this study could be transferred to

other settings, it was critical for the researcher to provide detailed and comprehensive descriptions pertaining to the participants, methods, setting, and themes (Creswell, 2003). The objective of this study was to provide clarity of the participants lived experiences and allow readers duplicate the findings in similar situations within a school setting.

The analytical process employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the rigor of the findings. The researcher's field notes were useful in this regard to substantiate the results. Member checking, also known as informant feedback or respondent validation, is a technique that was used (Creswell, 2017). Member checking was done during the interview process and at the conclusion of the study. Results were returned to participants via email to check for accuracy and quality of their experiences. The participants had one week to review the information and provide feedback, modifications, or corrections. If necessary, a Zoom meeting was scheduled with the researcher to discuss any questions, concerns, or suggestions the participant may have had concerning the data they received. One participant requested a Zoom meeting to expand on a comment he made during the focus group session.

For stronger content validity of the questions, two groups of cultural diversity scholars reviewed the focus group protocol. They determined whether the protocol items were written in a way that respondents could consistently understand and answer them. In addition, the scholars reviewed the protocol to determine whether the questions were establishing sufficient operational measures for responsiveness to cultural diversity.

To ensure intercoder reliability and agreement, peer debriefing was used through the process of coding, analyzing, and theming each focus group session. A secondary observer, PhD doctoral candidate, independently reviewed data for 30% of the coding. The researcher and the PhD

doctoral candidate identified themes from the focus groups individually which led to debriefing to conclude a commonality in the themes. The researcher and PhD doctoral candidate talked through each theme to ensure the themes match. Interobserver agreement was calculated based on the coding of the researcher and second coder. The sum of the agreements plus disagreements was divided by the total number of codes. Interobserver agreement was 92%.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. This study was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic, which limited the researcher's ability to conduct face-to-face focus group sessions. Having face-to-face focus group sessions would have allowed the researcher and the participants to build a rapport and provide a comfortable, safe environment for the participants. Second, direct observations of the students in their classrooms, and teachers providing culturally responsive instruction was not conducted due to the pandemic. As a result, the researcher was not able to observe if any of the teachers implemented culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Being able to observe the teachers' culturally responsive practices would have allowed the researcher to compare direct observations to the students' responses. Finally, this study employed a small sample size which consisted only of high school African American males who were receiving special education services or at risk for academic achievement. Although a larger sample size was not used for this study, this small sample allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of this phenomenon by virtue of interviewing a small, purposeful sample.

Conclusion

This chapter included details and an all-inclusive description of the methods that were used to conduct this study. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of high school

African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Through purposeful sampling of a specified criteria, seven participants for the focus group sessions were selected. Participants were recruited through teacher nominations.

For this research study, all participants participated in a virtual focus group session. The semi-structured audio-recorded virtual focus group sessions aided in the researcher gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perception on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Chapter 4 of this study includes student perceptions from the focus group sessions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Utilizing a purposeful sampling procedure, seven high school African American males were selected for this study. "Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals from sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 204). In order to gain insight into the high school African American males' experiences, focus groups were performed. Focus group sessions took place via Zoom, a software-based video conferencing platform. The cameras were turned off and each participant was given a pseudonym. Participant numbers were displayed on screen throughout the entire focus group sessions and the participants had the opportunity to establish rapport with each other prior to the beginning of the session. No participant's names were called, and no schools were named during the conversations.

The focus group sessions were audio recorded. The audio recording was then professionally transcribed using an online secured transcription service by TranscribeMe.com. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) How do high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity? (2) From the perspective of African American male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom?

The chapter on findings include data collection and the analysis used to answer the research questions. Data were collected through the two focus group sessions. Data were analyzed and themes were established and are supported by direct statements from the focus group sessions.

The research findings are from perspectives of the participants with quotations from them being used to clarify their experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Credibility was established by reviewing the responses from the participants several times to ensure transcriptions were accurately copied and correctly recorded. Once all focus groups were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions line by line to identify salient words and establish patterns. Codes were identified (see Table 1). Once the focus groups transcripts were coded and themes were identified, the researcher reached a conclusion on the overarching themes (see Table 2). The researcher was the primary coder, and the second coder was a doctoral candidate in a diversity related field. Both had experience in qualitative research methods. Trustworthiness of the data was achieved by calculating intercoder agreement. The sum of the agreements plus disagreements was divided by the total number of codes, which was 92%. The first and second coder discussed the discrepancy but did not come to a resolution. Per the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines, participants and their parents signed assent/consent forms and participants' anonymity was kept and participant numbers were used to protect their identities.

Table 1

Codes and Sample Quotes

Code	Sample Quote
Black History	During Black History Month, we learned about the same three people every year.
Caring	It made me feel good because it showed to me that he actually cared.
Comfort Zone	If you have different beliefs, they will make you feel comfortable. They won't just to be biased on opinions.
Community	Teachers know about what goes on like in the community and stuff. So, they've tried to like bring it to the classroom
Compassion	I believe one time she was talking about someone who got arrested, um, like wrongfully. She was really passionate about it.
Connection	All I know is we had a connection because she actually cared.
Degrading Remarks	It wasn't directly to me. But it was like, it was just a smart remark.
Disconnected	Um, I was in, like, French class and there was just all white people. I feel like they thought I was not as capable as they were.
Impact	I feel like it does impact like in a good way. It basically shows that your teacher is caring and wants you to like get it.
Incorporating Culture	I feel like she care about Black people because she's trying to teach us like about our history.
Race Factor	How people look at the news, and as majority, um, our culture out there or our race matters
Strategies	I would say like group activities

Table 2

Emergent Themes by Related Research Questions

Research Question	Theme	Code
RQ 1	Inclusion	Black History Disconnected Race Factor Degrading Remarks
RQ 2	Caring Relationships	Caring Comfort Zone Compassion
RQ 2	Establishing Communities and A Sense of Belonging	Community Connections
RQ 2	Incorporating Culture	Incorporating Culture Impact Strategies

Note: RQ = Research Questions

Participant Demographics

Student participants included seven high school African American males; two were 15, three were 17 and two were 18 years old (see Table 3). At the time of the study two students were in the tenth grade, two in the eleventh grade and three in the twelfth grade. Four of the students were identified as receiving special education services and three of the students were identified as at risk for academic challenges. All participants were receiving their educational services, in two or more classes, in the general education setting. All participants volunteered to participate in this study.

Table 3

| Participant Demographics | | | | | |
Name	Age	Grade	Ethnicity	Classification	Inclusion Classes
Participant 1 Dwayne	17	12	African American	Special Education	2
Participant 2 Terrence	17	11	African American	At Risk for Academic Challenges	4
Participant 3 Spencer	17	11	African American	At Risk for Academic Challenges	4
Participant 4 Vernon	15	10	African American	Special Education	4
Participant 5 Walter	15	10	African American	Special Education	4
Participant 6 Patrick	18	12	African American	Special Education	2
Participant 7 Malcolm	18	12	African American	At Risk for Academic Challenges	4

Participant 1

Participant 1, Dwayne, is an African American male who is 17 years of age. He is currently in the 12th grade and is identified as a student with a learning disability. He has been receiving special education services since he was in elementary school. At his current school, he has math and English in the general education setting. He has a learning lab class that assists him with his assignments for his other classes. He expressed that he is excited to be graduating at the end of the school year. He plans to attend college after graduation, although he is not sure what he will major in once he gets to college. Dwayne currently has an older sister who is a sophomore in college.

Participant 2

Participant 2, Terrence, is an African American male who is 17 years of age and in the 11th grade. Terrence was identified as at-risk for academic challenges and was retained in the ninth grade. He receives all of his educational services in the general education setting. He had excessive absences/tardiness, low grades, and behavioral issues during his ninth-grade year. Terrence expressed that he did not like school and if it was up to him, he would dropout. During a brief conversation with the researcher, prior to the focus group session, he shared with the researcher that his mother wanted him to get his high school diploma as she did not complete high school.

Participant 3

Participant 3, Spencer, is an African American male who is 17 years of age. He is currently in the 11th grade. Spencer was identified as at-risk for academic challenges. He receives all of his educational services in the general education setting. Spencer was retained in the third grade due to excessive absences. He stated that his family moved numerous times throughout his third-grade year. Spencer shared that he started school at an early age so being retained in the third grade did not impede his ability to graduate at age 18. He expressed that he could do the work provided to him in the classes, he just chooses not to do so because most times he was not interested in the topics.

Participant 4

Participant 4, Vernon, is an African American male who is 15 years of age and currently in the 10th grade. Vernon has been identified as in the category of Other Health Impairment. He receives all of his educational services in the general education setting. Vernon has received special education services since he was in the 7th grade. He shared that he likes school and does

well academically. Vernon stated that he does not let his disability get in the way of his school success. He works hard in all of his classes to make sure he gets good grades. He does not want his disability or race to be an excuse not to succeed in life.

Participant 5

Participant 5, Walter, is an African American male who is 15 years of age. He is currently in the 10th grade. Walter is identified as a student with a specific learning disability. He has been receiving special education services since he was in the second grade. Walter expressed that he struggled with reading and when he was younger, he often times acted out in class so he did not have to read. Although he still struggles with reading, he no longer acts out in class if he has to read. Walter states that science is his favorite subject. He receives all of his educational services in the general education setting. Walter has an older sibling who is at risk for academic challenges. He was also invited to participate in the study, but he chose not to do so. He stated did not want to be in a study with his younger sibling.

Participant 6

Participant 6, Patrick is a 12th grade African American male who is 18 years of age. He is certified as a student with a specific learning disability. Patrick has been receiving special education services since he was in the third grade. He receives two of his classes in the general education setting. He currently has two learning lab classes to assist him with his assignments in his other classes. Patrick believes he is doing well academically despite his being placed in special education. He is eager to graduate at the end of the year. He plans to attend college in the fall.

Participant 7

Participant 7, Malcolm, is an 18-year-old African American male who is currently in the 12th grade. He has been identified as a student at-risk for academic challenges. Malcolm was sent to an alternative school during his 10th grade year for getting into a physical altercation with three other students in the cafeteria. Malcolm voiced that he does not like school and he is unsure if he will be able to graduate at the end of the school year due to low grades in all of his classes. Through further conversation, Malcolm expressed that he would really like to attend college but he does not see that as an option for him. He is receiving all of his educational services in the general education setting.

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Findings

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   Responses to research questions. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the perceptions of high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Several themes were generated from the data analysis which related directly to the research questions. The themes that emerged were: (a) inclusion, (b) caring relationships, (c) establishing communities and a sense of belonging, and (d) incorporating culture.

Research Question 1: How do high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity?

Theme 1: Inclusion

   The seven participants in the study expressed similar sentiments regarding their school experience as it relates to their culture. When talking about the role of race in the classroom, each participant shared that race was unquestionably a primary factor, and not always in a positive way. All participants conveyed during the course of a school day; they were always aware of their race even if no one pointed it out as they knew that is how they were being viewed

by other cultures. They stated that their racial identity was first and foremost in relationships with teacher and peers. The participants expressed that they would never be able to escape being an "African American male" student. Dwayne's previous school enrollment consisted of predominately White students. He stated that particular school was not the best fit for him. Dwayne felt that the help he needed was not given to him because of his race. He was asked by the researcher, "What made you feel your race was a contributing factor?" and he replied that he watched other students, specifically White students, ask for the same help he was asking for and they got the help they needed from the teacher. But for Dwayne, when he asked his White female teacher for tutoring, she would just push his request aside.

Patrick shared he noticed in most schools; people of different races did not intermingle with other races.

> People from the same race, they come from the same background, so it is easier for them to interact. Other races have a harder time actually becoming friends with them.

Walter made a powerful statement when he acknowledged since the beginning of his educational experience, all of his teachers were mostly White. He did not encounter his first African American teacher until he was in middle school. Patrick and Malcolm, who were in the same focus group session with Walter, also expressed the same sentiments. The participants conveyed they did not see many, if any, male teachers of color while in elementary and middle school. They stated as they got to the high school level, they were able to see more male teachers who looked like them.

> When I was in middle school in, special education services, the teachers were mostly White. I only had one Black teacher out of all of them. I was in the 8th grade when I actually had a Black teacher.

> It felt good to see a teacher who looked like me. I felt the teacher could relate to me because we shared the same background because we were both African American.

Egalite et al. (2015) noted teachers from diverse populations are underrepresented in public schools in the United States. This causes a concern as a growing number of diverse students are populating public schools. Egalite et al., (2015) study found students' math and reading achievement are substantially and positively influenced by the race/ethnicity of their teacher for students of different races/ethnicities.

When speaking about culture being represented in the classroom, several of the participants indicated how disappointed they were that during Black History Month, the same people were highlighted year after year. Walter stated as far back as he could remember, he learned more about African Americans during Black History Month than any other time in the school year. He expressed that not many teachers went out of their way to include culture in the classroom unless it was specifically during the month of February. Walter remembered during Black History Month, especially in elementary school, all the classroom doors and bulletin boards were decorated for the entire month.

> We would learn about our culture in Black History Month, but then again, that's the same people, same things every year, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks. Only thing that we hear about, same events, the sit in - - the same thing every year.

> In elementary school, all the teachers would decorate their classrooms, and the hallways would be decorated too. Even then it was always the same people all the time.

Vernon realized something profound that had not occurred to him during his previous years of schooling. As he reflected on what the other participants were sharing, he also realized that he did not learn much about his culture outside of Black History Month. While in elementary school, he shared how the books were always about the same African American people that they talked about all the time.

> I realized kind of like, wow, we've been talking about the same three people, same event for so many years.

Patrick shared he became interested in his American History class when his teacher started sharing positive contributions African Americans made to society. He stated it felt good to hear about good things instead of always hearing about the how badly African Americans were treated. Patrick also stressed that it is important to hear about slavery and what African Americans endured. He said, "It's just good to hear about the positives as well."

> My junior year in American History 2, my teacher actually did research and was actually telling us the truth about how the races came to America. And how before, during and after slavery, there were some African Americans who had good jobs, money, and owned property. And he told us all about African Americans owning businesses. It was good to hear about the positives of African Americans instead of always hearing about the horrors of slavery.

All of the participants shared as they got older, they learned about the numerous contributions African Americans made to American society. The majority of the lessons were not always taught in the classrooms by their teachers. Terrence commented that teachers just follow the district's curriculum which consisted of the Eurocentric (White) viewpoint of American history which highlights the negative aspects of African Americans and not the positive impacts African Americans and other minority groups had on the American society.

The seven participants commented on how societal views of African American males and how it is prevalent in the classroom. Patrick commented on how he cannot escape being an African American male in school. He continued to share that people even look at him is differently because of his race. He believed during class changes, when he would move from one class to the next, he and his friends were always being watched by a White teacher on duty. Although he and his friends would be talking loudly, they were just playing around but never doing anything wrong. The participants are aware of how they are perceived by their teachers and peers. One of the participants stated people in society often see African American males as a threat. Spencer shared that he and his brothers were often perceived in a negative light outside of

school because they are always hanging out together. Therefore, there are some people who

perceived to be a danger to others. Spencer stated that he felt there is more pressure on the three

of them because they are African American. His awareness of this causes him to be more alert

and on guard.

> You have to keep your head on the right path, and if you don't it's very hard to be successful, because in high school, it's a lot of distractions, in and out of school, and they will get in the way of you graduating.

Terrence is also aware that this perceived threat is very much alive in the school setting.

> Teachers expect you to fail. As an African American male, they think I can't or don't want to learn so they do not expect much of me. They act like they are afraid of me and they just leave me alone. I don't like school. I think most of my White teachers are prejudice and they don't care about me.

Terrance shared with the group that at times he feels like dropping out of school but he knows he

won't because his mother really wants him to graduate from high school. He would be the first

one in his family to graduate from high school since his mother did not finish. Patrick also

expressed that how society views African American males' matter. He stated it is hard being an

African American male in society today. He went on to talk about the media and how they

portray African American males in a negative light.

> Watching all the news and seeing African Americans being gun-downed and how one kid got gun-downed for playing with his toy gun. Then they start bringing up all the negative things about the person who was killed. Basically, it's kinda hard being African American in the American society today.

Patrick believes that people are afraid of African American males solely because of what they

see on the television. He is of the opinion that most White people don't associate with African

American males or have close friends who are African American males; therefore, they do not

truly understand them. Malcolm also shared the same views as Patrick. He felt that African

American males are judged based solely on their race. Malcolm believed if people got to know each other, the world would be a much better place.

> A lot of people judge us on our color than really getting to know us and really trying to see exactly how that person is. Every African American is not gonna steal, everybody is not gonna cheat, and everybody is not gonna lie. So, I would say really getting to know that person instead of just judging that book by the cover.

According to Gibbons et al., (2004) 91% of adolescent African American males reported a negative experience of being discriminated against in school merely because of their race. All the participants in the study expressed being discriminated against by an adult in the school they attended at some point in their educational experience.

As a result of the cultural divide between students and teachers, African American male students often feel disconnected from the school setting (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). All participants expressed the power of language and how it can have a positive or negative effect on a person. Study participants also shared their beliefs of the importance of being in a school environment which allowed them to be respected and heard. When students feel they are taken seriously and their voices are heard, they are more likely to perform better academically (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014).

Study participants consistently reported at some point in their school experience they felt disconnected or excluded in the classroom because of their race. Often times, participants expressed how teachers would make snide remarks pertaining to their race in front of the entire class. Spencer shared one of his teachers was very sarcastic and he would throw out snide remarks about the African American students in the class. Spencer stated the teacher would act like he was joking when he made the comments but he did not feel like it was a joke nor did it make him feel welcomed in the class.

> This one teacher, I don't know if he was trying to be funny with it, but he would throw out little sly racial slurs sometimes, but he would play it off as a joke. But I didn't feel like he was joking. He would make me feel dumb or just call me out in front of the class because I'm known a lot in school, so he'd basically call me out but he would play it as a joke even though I knew he wasn't joking.

The majority of the seven participants stated they had to deal with some type of racism in the classroom. Dwayne stated although no comments were directed specifically to him, he has heard comments made to other African American males in the classroom. He shared he was very uncomfortable when the comments were made. Patrick had the same experience as Dwayne. He witnessed a teacher call another African American male "dumb" in front of the entire class. Patrick felt bad for the student because he was aware the student was going through a hard time at home. He believed if the teacher had taken the time to get to know the student, she would have known what he was going through and would have been able to be more sympathetic to his situation. Malcolm shared he has anxiety sometimes because he feels one day the snide racial comment will be directed towards him. He shared if he does not know an answer, he does not raise his hand and he puts his head down.

> Sometimes I have anxiety in school because of my skin tone. As an African American male, I feel like people are always judging me because of my skin color. When I have anxiety, I think everyone else is thinking I'm dumb or I can't do the school work. Thinking about it gets in the way of my school work.

Malcolm believes a person's skin tone matters, because certain skin tones are targeted more than others. Malcolm expounded on his statement by saying he was referring to African Americans versus White students. He stated he felt African Americans were treated differently because of their skin tone. Terrence voiced that although he did not have any current experiences at his current school, he did have a story to share about his previous school.

> So, at my old school, in the majority of my classes, I was like the only like Black

student in the class. And sometimes there would be smart remarks going towards my race. But I wouldn't really say nothing. But just being singled out in the classroom didn't feel good.

Five of the participants strongly felt snide remarks and smart comments pertaining to their race were common in all schools with African American students and White teachers, as they all had experiences with the issue of inappropriate comments dating back to elementary school.

Research Question 2: From the perspective of African America male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom?

Theme 2: Caring Relationships

One of the five principles from Gay's conceptual framework model of culturally responsive teaching is caring. According to Gay, (2002) a genuine caring relationship promotes academic and behavioral success of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The seven participants in this study were able to recall instances where they were exposed to teachers who genuinely cared about them. The participants described teachers who pushed them to succeed and to become better students. Teachers' high expectations of the participants was a factor in them doing well with their academic studies. The participants also appreciated the support and attention they received from the teachers who showed that they cared. Spencer shared with the group about a time when a White teacher, who he did not have a class with, saw him misbehaving in the hallway and pulled him aside to talk to him about the incident. He stated the teacher was very nice and she seemed to genuinely care about his actions and wanted him to do better with his studies. During the focus group session, Spencer expressed his gratitude toward the teacher as he said she would talk to him every time she saw him around the school.

They developed a positive student-teacher relationship. Vernon recalls an instance when he felt a

teacher created a caring relationship with him. He recounts the incident below:

> I had a Caucasian teacher. He was my art teacher. He brought my African American culture into the classroom. We were working on a project. He stepped out of his comfort zone to become more familiar with my culture, so he could help me with my project. It made me feel good because it showed me that he actually cared and wanted to learn more about me and my culture. He knew how to get involved in what I wanted to do. He would play African American music in the classroom, like hip hop, R&B, soul music. So, he would make us feel more comfortable. He would give good vibes. He had a great personality.

Dwayne also recalled a positive encounter he had with a teacher who he believed genuinely

cared for him.

> There was a Caucasian teacher at my new school. She helped me a lot with math and I went to a lot of her tutoring sessions. She actually cared. She told me she wanted me to be successful in her class. So, knowing that I had a teacher who actually cared, that was a different race than me was something special. I felt like she really liked me as a person. I don't know how to put it, but all I know is we had a connection because she actually cared and took time with me and my work.

Walter shared the same sentiments as Dwayne and Vernon. He reflected on a caring relationship

he had with his French teacher.

> My French teacher very nice, sweet, and actually very real. She could resonate with students from all cultural backgrounds. She was just a good teacher. She would communicate with us and actually talk to us. And she was actually interested in our topics. She did so good at helping me learn and make me want to learn. So, I think that's a big deal. She was just really good. I believe one time someone who got wrongfully arrested. And she was like why do they always do this? He did nothing wrong. She was like passionate about it. Okay. So, she showed compassion and she cared.

Participants shared their understanding of a relationship as defined by interactions between a

student and his/her teacher. This emphasized the need for teachers to recognize and focus on

their ability to establish caring relationships with students and to take heed that their failure to

establish nurturing relationships, can have a negative impact on students. It also reinforces the

impact teacher-student relationships have on the educational outcome of diverse students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009; Valenzuela, 2008).

Theme 3: Establishing Communities and A Sense of Belonging

When students feel a sense of belonging in the school environment it causes them to feel welcomed, valued and respected as members of the school community (Goodenow, 1993). A growing body of literature suggests students' feelings of belongingness influence academic achievement (Booker, 2004; Boston & Warren, 2017; Brooms, 2016; Faircloth, 2009). Students' emotional connections with teachers affirms their sense of belonging in schools. Participants in this study expressed the importance of having positive connections with their teachers. Being able to connect with at least one teacher in the school, helps establish a sense of belonging. All participants agreed if a teacher shows an interest in student as a person, the student feels the need to do well in their class. Spencer stated,

> When a teacher is looking out for you, you start looking out for them. So, you start working harder in that class."

Vernon was eager to share his experience about his math teacher that he connected with.

> She was just a good teacher. She would communicate with us and actually talk to us. She would share personal stuff about her life. And she did so good with helping me like learn and make me want to learn. So, I think that's a big deal. She was just really good.

All participants in this study shared stories of teachers they connected with. All teachers mentioned by the participants, shared the same characteristics. The teachers incorporated a positive learning environment that encouraged the participants. Group and partner activities were also implemented which allowed students to learn from each other. The theoretical framework of culturally responsive teaching encourages students to utilize different ways of displaying mastery. Patrick shared that his ability to understand the content in his English class was contributed to him working with other students in the classroom.

It was different in her class because the students in the class were put in to groups with people who did not always look like them. They could interact with others that come from the different backgrounds. And people of different race, like Mexican or Caucasian. This allowed us to get to other students that we might not otherwise associate with.

Terrance recalled an incident with his World History teacher that had a major impact on him.

I remember struggling in school and having a hard time staying focused. I didn't pay attention in class and I didn't care about the grades I made. My teacher pulled me aside one day and asked me how I was doing. I never had a teacher ask me that since I've been in high school so I was hesitant to answer. He started asking me questions about myself, my interests, my family and my community. I started out giving short answers but the more we talked, the more I shared. After talking to him, I started doing better in his class. I connected with him and I felt safe in his class.

Spencer recalled his teacher incorporating his culture into a lesson to help him comprehend the concept.

I remember when my teacher basically broke it down into a more simpler way that I could understand and get the point. He gave an example of something related to my culture. It made me feel good. I feel like it does impact like in a good way because it basically shows that your teacher is caring and wants you to like get it in the best form or wants you to learn it. And it shows that the teacher is putting in time to learn your culture and connect with you.

The participants' perceptions of having a connection with a teacher and feeling like a member of the community had a positive impact on them. All participants believed having a sense of community was critical to their school experiences. Feeling connected to the school community and having a sense of importance are both important for all students (Brooms, 2016). Spencer recalled his teacher incorporating his culture into a lesson to help him comprehend the concept.

We were working on a concept in math class one day. It was dealing with word problems and I always have a hard time understanding word problems. I just didn't know what I was supposed to do. My teacher saw that I was having a hard time. She kept saying, Spencer, you'll get it. But I didn't believe it. For the warm-up the next day, my teacher presented some world problems that included parts of my culture. I was really surprised because I remember thinking she really wanted me to get it. She wanted me to succeed. It made me feel really good about being in her class.

In addition to having a connection with teachers who helped to establish school community and fostered a sense of belonging, participants recalled incidences when their schools fostered a welcoming environment by including their families and communities into the school culture. The schools held workshops and various activities for families. The workshops focused on helping families navigate the many aspects of school. Three of the participants shared stories of how their teachers brought in African Americans speakers from the community to speak to their classes. Participants were able to learn about various organizations they can be a part of as well as job and career opportunities.

> One day we had an African American judge come to our class to speak with us. Um I was really surprised to see an actual judge and even more surprised to see that he was African American. Even though I didn't know him, I felt really proud. I was like hey I can actually be a judge one day.

> We had a speaker, I don't remember his name, but he came to talk to us about his journey. He told us that he was not a good student when he was in school. He got into trouble all the time, and almost got kicked out of school when he was in high school. He said he was smart but he did not care about making good grades. He told us when he was 16 years old, one of his close friends was shot and killed. That's when he decided to turn his life around. He stopped acting out in school and started doing his work. He graduated from high school and went on to college. I was really impressed with his story.

Schools' hosts numerous activities for families throughout the school year so they can be involved in their child's education. Collaboration between the school learning community and community partners is beneficial to increase a student's learning experiences and opportunities.

Theme 4: Incorporating Culture

A basis for culturally responsive teaching is adapting lessons and activities to reflect the cultural and learning differences of students. Incorporating a student's cultural background into the curriculum makes the instruction relevant and meaningful to the student (Delpit 1995; Gay, 2010; Irvine 2002). Teaching using culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally sustaining pedagogy is essential to student learning (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2018; Woodard et al.,

2017). It empowers students in various aspects including, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. All participants recalled incidences of teachers incorporating their culture into the lessons and the impact it had on them. Culturally responsive teaching encompasses a student's culture in the lessons which allows the student to learn more about experiences, contributions, challenges, and lives of different racial groups (Gay, 2013). Culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralisms as part of dexterity as schooling for positive transformation" (Paris & Alims, 2017, p.12). Culturally sustaining pedagogy suggests a student's individuality and culture progresses over time and teachers need to sustain both the student's culture as it is at the time and their culture as it evolves over time (Paris & Alims, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is an extension of culturally responsive pedagogy (Paris, 2015). Dwayne also believed it was good to learn about other cultures in the classroom. He described it as being refreshing to hear about more than just the White race. He stated a teacher had a major impact on him to learn more about his own culture.

> It made me feel good just knowing that we actually had something to talk about other than Caucasian people and their history. So, it was just like another topic we could talk about, and knowing that we could focus on us instead of just the Caucasian race.

Vernon shared how his English teacher had numerous books about different cultures in her classroom. They often were assigned books to read that highlighted a culture of someone in the classroom. He indicated he enjoyed reading books about the African American culture. Vernon felt his teacher was supporting him and other students like him of the same culture.

> In my English class we would read books about different people and places. It was exciting to read about African American people even if some of the stories weren't true.

Patrick expressed how he loves to learn about his culture. He finds it more interesting to learn about people who look like him. It is important for him to know about the positive contributions of African American people. Patrick said it saddened him that the focus is always on slavery. He does not understand why it is not a requirement of schools to teach about various cultures.

> It was different in her class because the students in the class were put into groups with people who did not always look like them. They could interact with others that come from the different backgrounds. And people of different race, like Mexican or Caucasian. This allowed us to get to know other students that we might not otherwise associate with.

Spencer's statement was aligned with what Patrick shared. He expressed that often times he did not like to do schoolwork because he was not interested in the topic.

> I just felt like a lot of stuff we talked about in class was boring. I wasn't interested in what we were talking about because it did not relate to me.

Culturally responsive teachers are aware of the how formal school curricula addresses the needs of diverse students and make the necessary changes. According to Gay (2001), culturally responsive teachers address controversial issues, such as race, class, ethnicity, and gender. It is critical for teachers to create classroom environments that are inclusive for diverse students.

Role as a Researcher

As a former special education teacher of thirty-two years, the researcher experienced first-hand the impact of the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Having taught at the high school level, the researcher had numerous first-hand conversations and positive student-teacher relationships with African American male students, and as a result developed an interest in this topic. To eliminate research bias as a potential threat in this qualitative study, during the focus group sessions, the researcher was constantly aware of her biases or prejudices to reduce the effects of the biases. The researcher practiced focus group protocol (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Rodriguez, 2011) during the questioning sessions as to not

influence the participants' responses. During the focus group sessions, a researcher's tone of voice, interest level, and question order could lead to unintentional bias, on behalf of the researcher, which can impact the participants responses. The researcher was careful to ask the questions exactly as they were written, maintain a consistent, neutral tone of voice.

If unchecked, the researchers implicit bias can corrupt the research data and possibly void the entire study. Therefore, the researcher was consciously aware of her biases, before and during the focus group session as to actively lessen the occurrence of those biases. The researcher also used best practices for focus group sessions to ensure the participants were comfortable and able to speak freely without restraint. Trustworthiness was established through member checking which allowed the participants to review the data to confirm their actual thoughts and feelings were truthfully represented. Member checking, as described in chapter 3, is a technique in which the researcher shares the data with the participants to allow them to check for accuracy.

Summary

This chapter presented the profiles of seven high school African American males at risk for academic challenges or special education services as well as excerpts from in-depth focus groups sessions that support the themes that emerged from the data: (a) inclusion, (b) caring relationships, (c) establishing communities and a sense of belonging, and (d) incorporating culture.

Participants shared their experiences with cultural diversity during the focus group sessions. During the collection of the data, participants were informed that the information collected would be based solely on their experience with teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Though students shared experiences in elementary and middle school, participants were

reminded to focus on their experiences in high school that involved interactions with teachers of a different culture other than their own.

Chapter Five offers a discussion and interpretation of the findings presented in this chapter, a demonstration of a connection to Culturally Responsive Teaching theoretical framework and the literature reviewed in chapter two. Additionally, limitations, implications to practice, and recommendations for future research will also be presented.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the perception of high school African American male students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Seven African American males participated in this study. Two virtual focus group sessions were conducted via Zoom. This chapter includes discussion of major findings as related to the literature on overrepresentation of African American males in disciplinary referrals, special education referrals, school to prison pipeline and culturally responsive teaching.

Findings of this study showed four themes emerged from the students' responses pertaining to teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity in inclusive settings: (a) inclusion; (b) caring relationships; (c) establishing communities and a sense of belonging; and (d) incorporating culture. In addition, this study also explored what characteristics of culturally responsive teaching practices were evident in the students' perceptions shared during the focus group sessions. The research questions were: (a) How do high school African American males receiving special education services or at-risk for academic challenges perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity? (b) From the perspective of African American male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom? The results of this study extended the literature in examining students' perceptions on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. This chapter discusses outcomes from the study based on each research question and includes themes that emerged from the focus group sessions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a brief summary.

This chapter contains discussions and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions:

RQ 1: How do high school African American males receiving special education services or at-risk for academic challenges perceive their teachers' responsiveness to cultural diversity?

RQ 2: From the perspective of African American male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom?

The qualitative analysis produced rich accounts of secondary African American males' intimate feelings, views, reflections, and opinions pertaining to themselves and their school experience as it relates to cultural diversity. Data were collected through two focus group sessions with seven high school African American males.

Discussion of Findings

Four overarching themes emerged from the data analysis of the focus groups. Excerpts from each focus group session served as supportive evidence for each theme were presented in chapter four. Although the ages, grades, and classifications may differ for each of the participants, each of the four common themes represented the seven high school African American males who participated in the focus group sessions. Each theme is briefly summarized and then expounded in detail in the following sections.

Research Question 1: How do high school African American males receiving special education services perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity?

Theme 1: Inclusion

Eighty percent of public-school teachers are White, yet African American students make up 15% of all students (Ladson-Billings, 2001; USDOE, 1998; Weinstein et al., 2004). Complicating these statistics, studies show that teachers' implicit bias impacts African American students' academic abilities, expectations, and performance more so than White students (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016; McIntosh et al., 2017; Rudd, 2014). Results from this study seem to substantiate these findings. Previous literature has focused on African American elementary students (Howard, 2001), African American elementary and middle school students (Howard, 2002), and special education students in middle school (Hughes et al., 2011).

Jacoby-Senghor et al., (2016) found evidence that teachers' implicit bias impacted their beliefs of African American students' academic abilities. Based on implicit teacher biases, Jacoby-Senghor et al., (2016) predicted low test scores and poor academic performances for African American and Hispanic students but not White students. The role of history and societal expectations of African American males are also factors. Over the course of numerous decades, stereotypes augment the belief that CLD students are less intelligent than their White peers, especially students from African American and Latinx backgrounds (Harry & Klinger, 2014). The majority of the participants in this study shared how they perceived their race as an integral part of their education that contributed to their success or lack thereof. Dewayne believed his teacher did not give him the extra help he needed in his classes because he was an African American student, and the teacher did not have high expectations of him.

> I felt like I wasn't being taught. If I needed help, and I'll go ask for it from my Caucasian teachers. I felt like I wasn't getting the help I needed when I asked for like tutoring and things like that. I was kind of pushed to the side. For me, it was all about race.

Participants discussed how aspects of society plagued their experiences in the classroom. Each participant recalled stories of how they were perceived by their teachers as well as their

peers. These findings are aligned with African American males reports of feeling like they are viewed as gangbangers and killers (Hensfield, 2011). Terrence expressed his feelings about his belief that teachers view African American males as a threat.

> I think because White people see all the negative stories on tv about African American males, killing or robbing people, they have a fear of African American males. Um, I feel the media is always portraying the negative parts of African Americans so it feeds into the stereotypes White people have of us.

The students' perceptions expressed in this study would support literature regarding teachers' misconceptions of African American male students as having aggressive behavior, low achievement skills, and needing special education services. Neal et al., (2003). conducted a study focusing on teachers' perceptions of African American male students' cultural physical movement (walking/strolling). Findings suggested based largely on African American male students' cultural physical movement, teachers perceived them to be aggressive in nature, unintelligent and requiring special education services. McIntosh et al., suggested discipline and special education referrals are result of teacher negative racial stereotypes. Irvine, (2003) argued teachers are less likely to embrace cultural stereotypes or negative views if they are exposed to multicultural teacher preparation programs. Spencer shared:

> Sometimes I felt disconnected when I read in front of the class. Even though I could read, as good as the White students, I just felt awkward, like everyone was looking at me. Like I was being judged. It was probably just in my mind, but yeah, I felt disconnected.

Several scholars conducted research on the relationship of students and teachers of the same race/ethnicity (Egalite et al., 2015; Sealy-Ruiz & Green, 2015; Vega et al., 2015). The research suggests there are academic and behavioral benefits for students of color when they are taught by teachers who look like them. Several of the participants expressed their comfort with having an African American teacher. Two of the participants stated they did not have a preference of a male or female African American teacher as long as they were of their culture. All of the

participants expressed they felt more comfortable with an African American teacher, so they were more likely to be themselves; whereas they felt they had to be on guard with a White teacher. Walter shared his experience with not having an African American teacher until he was in the 8th grade.

> When I was in middle school, in special education services, the teachers were mostly White. I only had one Black teacher out of all of them. I was in the 8th grade when I actually had a Black teacher.

Boutte and Hill, (2006) noted that educational curriculum and standards are known to be culturally relevant to White, majority students since most of the content is centered on White culture, which puts African American students at a disadvantage. All cultures are expected to assimilate to the European culture. They must sacrifice their "languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to be successful in school" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.1). Seldom do White teachers incorporate cultures other than their own into the lessons and activities completed by the students in the classroom. African American students often had to endure hearing about the same people during Black History Month year after year. All participants expressed the same sentiments. As far back as participants could remember, Black History Month has always been the same since elementary school. Walter shared with the group his disappointment in the limited amount of history that was shared with them over the years.

> We would learn about our culture in Black History Month, but then again, that's the same people, same things every year, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks. Only thing that we hear about, same events, the sit in- - the same thing every year.

> I realized kind of like, wow, we've been talking about the same three people, same event for so many years.

It is noted a majority of African American males' experience education differently than any other racial group in the U.S. and that these experiences are historically rooted in what it means to be African American and male. Systemic racism exists in the American society which

includes the educational system. Findings from this study are also aligned with Ladson-Billings

and Tate's *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* (1995). Critical race theory offers

conceptual tools for investigating how race and racism have been longstanding and maintained in

the educational system (Sleeter, 2017). One of the assertions of critical race theory is that racism

is systematic, which means White female teachers account for a large number of the teacher

population; however, they do not contain the knowledge and skills necessary to teach diverse

students (Milner et al., 2013; Rogers-Ard et al., 2013). Critical race theory offers diverse

students a voice and allows them to share their perspectives of their lived experiences on how

race impacted their educational experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Sleeter, 2016).

Teachers have a responsibility to enhance the knowledge, skills and understanding of the role

cultural diversity plays in a student's academic and behavioral outcome.

A growing body of literature has revealed that students experience discrimination throughout

their school experience (Brown, 2017; Neblett et al., 2006; Simons et al., 2002). Brown (2017)

indicated African American students expressed feelings of vulnerability due to increased

awareness of racial differences and heightened racial tensions in and outside their communities.

African American youth are more likely to experience racial discrimination in school, as they get

older. When students feel they are not welcomed or respected by their teachers and peers, it is

probable that learning will be minimized. Racial discrimination in school environments may be a

predictor to the lack of academic achievement. Research shows that interactions between

teachers and students impact how African American males think about themselves as students. It

also affects their motivation and engagement (Epstein et al., 2011; Weeks & Nelson, 2018). The

participants reported experiencing discrimination, either directly or indirectly in the classroom.

Walter, Spencer and Vernon shared their experiences with discrimination.

> This one teacher, I don't know if he was trying to be funny with it, but he would throw out little sly racial slurs sometimes, but he would play it off as a joke. But I didn't feel like he was joking. He would make me feel dumb or just call me out in front of the class because I'm known a lot in school, so he'd basically call me out but he would play it as a joke even though I knew he wasn't joking.

> This one teacher, she called this African American student dumb because he was having a hard time at home because his dad, like, recently went to jail and mom--was dealing with cancer. And he had to provide for his brother and sister. I kinda felt bad for him because he was just doing anything he could to provide for his brother and sister and make sure his mom was okay. She didn't even try to find out what was going on with him. Like why he wasn't doing his work.

> It was not directed towards me, I guess, but I feel like there are certain skin tones (African Americans) teachers target more than others (White people).

Teachers must critically examine their own thoughts, behaviors and begin to acknowledge they are impacted by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language. Disparities between schools and society support longstanding discrimination against students of color and sustains a privileged society based on social class and skin color (Kea et al., 2006).

Research Question 2: From the perspective of African America male high school students receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges, what evidence of cultural responsiveness was observed in the classroom?

Theme 2: Caring Relationships

Garza (2009) discusses "ethic of care" and its importance for creating a positive school environment for student. Stipek (2000) linked teachers fostering positive relationships with student's motivation, and effort which Scales & Taccogna (2000) view are critical elements of learning. Pang (2005, p. 422) stated that, "Ethic of care described teachers who decisively make a commitment to learn about their students' cultural backgrounds." Aside from developing caring relationships with students, teachers can model to students how to develop caring relationships themselves.

This study found that students perceived the importance of teachers displaying a caring disposition toward their students. The emphasis on a caring relationship in this study is consistent with the literature regarding culturally responsive teaching. Howard (2006) identified seven principles of culturally responsive teaching; one of which was teachers demonstrating cultural care. Proponents of culturally responsive teaching recognized the importance of teachers displaying care as it is a vital component of culturally competent teachers. Gay (2010), emphasized the importance of culturally responsive concern as "it focuses on caring *for* instead *of* about the personal well-being and academic success of ethnically diverse students, with a clear understanding that the two are interrelated" (p.48). A student's perception of a caring relationship is associated with a positive interaction between the teacher and student. The caring relationship provides a foundation for improved academic and behavioral performances. Vernon and Walter eagerly expressed their sentiments about a teacher who showed genuine care towards him.

> She actually cared. She told me she wanted me to be successful in her class. So, knowing that I had a teacher who actually cared, that was a different race than me was something special.

> You have a teacher that actually seemed like they want to be there, and they want you to learn. So, it's a breath of fresh air. I mean, if they care, you want to care as well.

A lengthy discussion ensued among participants when they shared stories of teachers who they felt genuinely cared about them. All participants agreed teachers who spent time getting to know them, helping them with their work, and wanting them to succeed helped them to become better students. Patrick expanded on the impact a teacher's caring has on students.

> I feel like it does have an impact in a good way cause it basically shows that your teacher is caring and wants you to get it the best you can and wants you to learn. It shows that the teacher is putting in time.

> Well yeah, cause when someone's looking out for you as well, you start looking out for them. You start to work harder in that class.

Spencer also shared a story about his experience with a teacher who displayed care.

"It made me feel good because it showed me that he actually cared and wanted to learn more about me and my culture."
Katz (1999) describes this essential combination:

> "High expectations without caring can result in setting goals that are impossible for the student to reach without adult support and assistance. On the other hand, caring without high expectations can turn dangerously into paternalism in which teachers feel sorry for 'underprivileged' youth but never challenge then academically. High expectations and caring, in tandem, can make a powerful difference in students' lives" (p. 814).

This study found the major characteristic of culturally responsive teaching most frequently perceived by all the students was caring relationships for African American males receiving special education or at-risk for academic challenges. Students shared teachers showed cultural competence and taught students to show care towards other cultures.

Theme 3: Establishing Communities and A Sense of Belonging

The literature emphasizes the importance of promoting interpersonal relationships between the students and teachers; school and family; and school and community (Brooms, 2016; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009; Saifer et al., 2011; Valenzuela, 2008). Previous studies undertaken referred to establishing communities as a component of culturally responsive teaching (Brooms, 2016; Gay, 2010). This study's results emphasized culturally responsive teaching practices. Creating a family-type atmosphere is an essential strategy for developing effective connections (Howard, 2002; Howard, 2001). Heller (1989; cited by Howard, 2001) noted by focusing on students' similarities, as related to their mutual interests, cultural backgrounds, familial histories, and shared experiences, students are able to come together to develop social relationships with students of cultures unlike their own. A teacher who is culturally responsive knows to recognize the importance of developing connections between

themselves and their students, as well as foster relationships between the students of different cultures. Vernon expressed his gratitude towards a teacher who he developed a connection with.

> She was just a good teacher. She would communicate with us and actually talk to us. She would share personal stuff about her life. And she did so good with helping me like learn and make me want to learn. So, I think that's a big deal. She was just really good.

Open communication with the parents and allowing them to help the student create a positive school experience is also essential. Students expressed the need to see their teacher showing concern for all aspects of their lives. Terrance and Dwayne shared about a time when their teacher reached out to their parents.

> After the first few weeks of school, my teacher called my mom to tell her about all the good things I was doing in her class. I was really surprised because most teachers only call for the bad things I do in class. It made my mom happy.

> Yea, I had a teacher who would call my house about once every couple of months and only tell my mom good things about me. I found myself working harder in her class so I could make my mom proud.

Each of the students in the focus group also stated they believed it was important for teachers to establish a welcoming environment in the classroom and set the tone for the positive relationships in the classroom. Malcolm stated:

> From the first day I walked in my Spanish class, I knew I was going to like it. My teacher greeted us at the door and called us ma'am and sir. After we got into the room and class started. She put us into groups. I did not know anyone in my group and at first, I felt uncomfortable. She told us to tell our group one thing about our culture we were most proud of. I really liked the activity and I learned some things about my classmates that I would not have known. I felt a strong connection to my teacher and some of my classmates. I really enjoyed her class.

A student's high school experience has a major impact on their well-being. A student's sense of belonging can be affected by the social, emotional and environmental dynamics as the aforementioned factors create and maintain racial stereotypes and exclusion (Booker 2004;

Rosenbloom, & Way, 2004). Spencer shared insight on his feelings about this connection with teachers and feeling a part of the school culture.

> I feel like school is basically about vibes. Like, the work can be hard at times. But when you do good in the school, if the teacher makes it fun and, they try to involve you in-- as much as they can in activities, I feel like that makes a person happy to come to school with a better attitude and it helps you get your work done more. But I feel like when a teacher's mad about coming to their job, it makes the students' confidence go down. I had teacher in my high school career that honestly made me wanna go to school just because they were there. Teachers are there to make you comfortable, get to know you, and teach you more things and to get you to the next stage.

Students often feel disconnected from the school setting due to the teachers' inability to grasp the cultural background of African American students (Ford & Harris, 1996). Additionally, African American students' awareness of their race and the impact it has on their schooling can influence their academic achievement and feelings of sense of belonging in school (Byrd & Chavous, 2011).

Theme 4: Incorporating Culture

Gay (2010) suggested when teachers incorporate a student's lived experiences and frame of reference with academic knowledge and skills, learning becomes more meaningful and relevant to the student. Research shows diverse students' academic achievement improves when taught through their own cultural lens (Gay, 2000, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Participants identified teachers who incorporated various cultural backgrounds in the classroom; however, participants noted the conversations were limited through to random conversations or sparse comments about diverse cultures that were often regulated by the curriculum. The students also believed that their teachers were interested in their cultural backgrounds, but some of the students expressed they did not believe the teachers knew much, if anything at all, about their personal backgrounds. However, all participants felt their teachers valued their cultural backgrounds, and showed genuine care for them as an individual. Terrance shared:

> Um, I feel like she care about Black people because she's trying to teach us about our history. She asks us questions about personal life and then she connects it to something we are learning in class.

Students acknowledged their cultural background played a significant role in how they learn. Howard (2003) suggested culturally response teaching teachers must avoid stereotypes and reflect on their own implicit biases. Instead, they should "develop individual profiles of students based on students' own thoughts and behaviors" (p. 201). Howard (2003) also adds that unless schools incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum and teachers reflect on the needs of the students, schools will continue to fail to meet the academic needs of diverse learners. Culturally responsive teaching involves teaching diverse students about their cultural heritage and awareness of their ethnic identity along with the core subjects such as math, science, social studies and reading. Additionally, Gay (2002) contents culturally responsive teaching should include information about diverse students "histories, cultures, contributions, and experiences of different ethnic groups in all subjects" (p. 624).   One participant, Spencer, spoke about his experience with a teacher who incorporated his culture into the lessons.

> We were working on a concept in math class one day. It was dealing with word problems and I always have a hard time understanding word problems. I just didn't know what I was supposed to do. My teacher saw that I was having a hard time. She kept saying, Spencer, you'll get it. But I didn't believe it. For the warm-up the next day, my teacher presented some world problems that included parts of my culture. I was really surprised because I remember thinking she really wanted me to get it. She wanted me to succeed. It made me feel really good about being in her class.

Schmitz (1999) created a guideline for culturally responsive curriculum to aid teachers in developing a culturally appropriate curriculum for diverse students. The guideline consists of five areas: (a) define learning goals; (b) questions conceptual concepts; (c) understand student diversity; (d) select materials and activities; and (e) evaluate effectiveness. Providing students with various cultural activities will allow them to gain knowledge, skills, and competence (Kea

et al., (2006). Walter recalled a time when his teacher allowed the students to help choose the

reading materials they were reading in class.

> I had this one English teacher who was pretty cool. Whenever the whole class had to read a book, she would give us the names of some books and then we would vote on them as a class. We were able to pick which book we were interested in reading. Most teachers just assigned a book and didn't give you a choice.

Culturally responsive teaching allows teachers to adapt instructional materials and activities in

the classroom to bring more equity to diverse students, especially those who are in impoverished

and disempowered in schools.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study's findings are significant for the field of special education, administrators and

teachers who work directly with culturally diverse students. Findings support the improvement

of academic achievement of diverse students, and closing the racial achievement gap. Barton &

Coley, (2010) noted there is a need for work continues to be done in the area of culturally

responsive teaching skills, knowledge, and implementation. Although the educational scores of

diverse students have gradually improved, the achievement gap between White and diverse

students has not changed (Barton & Coley, 2010). School personnel should ponder the findings

of this study and how these African American male students' perceptions might show similarities

in the relationships between students and teachers in their schools. The findings from this study

suggest with training all teachers, no matter their cultural background, implicit biases, and

education, can meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of African American male

students. The understanding of culturally responsive practices can improve school personnel's

respect and caring toward diverse students receiving special education services and at risk for

academic challenges.

Many preservice teachers enter the teaching profession with solid convictions in their ability to educate culturally and linguistically diverse students. The cultural gap that exists between a teacher and student and the inadequate preparations of the teacher to teach students of cultures other than their own can hinder effective culturally responsive teaching practices. The findings of this and other research studies (Howard, 2001, 2002; Hubert et al., 2011) suggest at least three major implications for African American males at risk for academic challenges and special education services in a regular education setting. First these implications suggest the need for preservice teacher preparation programs to make a requirement for all preservice teachers to obtain a certificate in culturally responsive teaching as a part of their teaching license. Teacher education programs need to prepare teachers to believe in their ability to both knowledgeable, skilled, and self-confident in their capabilities to implement the practices of culturally responsive teaching. The second implication for this research is critical to developing a better understanding of the role teachers play in enhancing African American male students academic and behavioral outcomes. Ongoing professional development should be offered to inservice teachers to ensure they stay current on culturally responsive teaching practices. The third implication for this study impacts the total school environment. Changing school culture to include building relationships and trust in the total school environment is essential for African American male students. Research shows that implementing mentor programs for African American male students has a significant impact on their academic achievement (Egalite et al., 2015; Sealy-Ruiz, & Green, 2015; Vega et al., 2015).

A number of scholars have conducted research on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000, 2002; Howard, 2010; Irvine, 2002, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000), and there is an increased awareness of its effect on diverse students' achievement, student-teacher relationships,

and classroom culture. However, college and universities and states' have yet to invest in the training of district and school staff on the components of culturally responsive teaching as it relates to implementing policy and deeper levels of change. Doing so could provide preservice and in-service teachers the means to offer diverse students relevant and meaningful instruction. Meaningful instruction would allow for educators to aid in closing the achievement gap, that continues to widen, between culturally diverse students and their White peers. Educators, especially at the university level, can act as change agents by beginning to include culturally responsive teaching interwoven within college courses. School level central office administrators are the change-agents in K-12 systems who could reform the educational system to develop methods of culturally responsive teacher training at all levels of general and special education. Educators can work to change the school culture by questioning conventional policies and practices, and by implementing culturally responsive teaching practices.

Limitations of the Study

The study like all studies included in a few limitations. First, the Covid-19 pandemic interfered with the researcher's ability to conduct face-to-face focus group sessions. Therefore, the researcher's rapport with the students had to be developed over the phone prior to the focus group session. A face-to-face interaction may have yielded a better relationship between the researcher and the participants. The focus groups sessions were conducted via Zoom. Since the student's cameras were turned off to ensure privacy, students were not able to establish comradery with each other. The second limitation of this study was the sample size was considerably small. However, phenomenological research encourages smaller number of participants in order to gain a thorough understanding of the participants lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied. A small sample size also limits the possibility of applicability of the

findings across a larger number of high school African American males. The final limitation of this study was direct observation of classroom environments were not conducted. Direct observations would have allowed the researcher to observe the teachers' characteristics of culturally responsive teaching.

Recommendations for Future Research

Most of the research addressing student perception suggests a need to continue to explore the views and opinions of students since their voice is seldom represented in the literature**.** Studies, such as this one, indicates a need to conduct similar studies to understand the significance of the teacher's role in helping students from diverse cultural backgrounds contribute to the discussion on school reform and policy. There are aspects of this study that may necessitate further research. These are the following recommendations:

1. The study was conducted with seven high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. It may be beneficial to conduct a similar study with a larger population, still consisting of high school African American males, to get a wider range of responses on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity.

2. Conduct a follow-up study with the teachers mentioned in this study to understand the perceptions of the teachers to confirm or disconfirm the results of this current study. Observations and focus group sessions will be utilized.

3. This study was conducted with seven adolescent African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. One could conduct the same study with the high school African American females receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges.

4. Conduct a study with teachers to answer the research questions "When looking at culturally responsive teaching, which practices are more effective for African American students?"

5. This study was conducted with high school African American males receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges in an urban setting. This study should be replicated with the same student population in a rural setting.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of high school African American male students receiving special education services, or at risk for academic challenges, on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Seven African American males participated in this study. Two virtual focus group sessions were engaged via Zoom. Four themes emerged from this study: (a) inclusion; (b) caring relationships; (c) establishing communities and a sense of belonging; and (d) incorporating culture. In review of the literature, there was a significant amount of emphasis placed on the correlation between culturally responsive teaching and positive student academic success. In-depth interviews via focus group sessions with the participants provided insight into how students perceived caring relationships, positive classroom and school communities, feelings of a sense of belonging and incorporating culture into the curriculum as essential factors in closing the cultural gap between teachers and students. The perceptions of these African American male students further corroborated the need for teachers to be competent in culturally responsive teaching.

In conclusion, although this study's findings do not solve the overrepresentation of African-American males at risk for academic challenges, special education services, disciplinary actions, dropout rates, and incarceration, they do suggest aspects of teaching educators can implement to

positively impact the quality of educational services provided to this particular student population. Research has shown a correlation exists between teachers' cultural competence and students' positive academic and behavioral outcomes (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Howard & Terry, 2011; Rychly & Graves, 2012).

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APPENDIX A: Email to District Administrator

Email to District Administrator

Hello,

In my current role as a full-time doctoral student with the Special Education Department at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I am conducting my dissertation which is focused on the **perceptions of high school African American males at-risk for academic challenges or receiving special education services of their teachers' responsiveness to cultural diversity**. Knowing XXXXXX Schools are invested in the quality of special education services for African American males, I hope to share this opportunity with you.

I would like to conduct an **online focus group session** with African American males at-risk for academic challenges or receiving special education services. I will need the help of the teachers to send a recruitment email to parents/students who qualify for this study. There will be no face-to-face interactions with the students. Cameras will be off during the focus group sessions and each student will be given a pseudonym to use throughout the meeting.

Please let me know the procedures to request permission to conduct my dissertation research with XXXXXX Schools.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

If you have any questions, please contact Kim Reddig, Researcher, kmiddle1@uncc.edu, (704) 777-4158 or Gloria Campbell-Whatley, Faculty Advisor, gcampbe1@uncc.edu.

APPENDIX B: Email to Teachers

Email to Teachers

To Teachers:

My name is Kim Reddig. I am a retired special education teacher of 33 years and a current doctoral candidate at UNC Charlotte. I am presently working on recruiting African American high school male students to participate in a focus group session on **Student's Perceptions on Teacher Responsiveness to Cultural Diversity**. The purpose of this study is to explore how high school African American males at-risk for academic challenges or receiving special education services perceive teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. I am looking for students who would like to express themselves and let their voices be heard.

To participate in this study, students must meet the following criteria: (a) students classified by the school system as at-risk for academic challenges or receiving special education services, (b) self-identify as African American male, (c) classified as a high school sophomore, junior, or senior, and (d) receiving instruction, in at least one of their classes, in an inclusive setting (i.e., general education setting).

The data from this research will be used to provide information on strategies and methods educators can use to improve the conditions of the African American male population in the educational environment.

For this study, cultural diversity is defined as the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a school setting.

I have included a recruitment email for parents/students who qualify for this study. Please send this to parents of students who meet the criteria listed above.

 You may contact me, Kim Reddig, Researcher, kmiddle1@uncc.edu, (704) 777-4158 or Gloria Campbell-Whatley, Faculty Advisor, gcampbe1@uncc.edu for questions or concerns.

APPENDIX C: Email to Parents/Students

Email to Parents/Students

My name is Kim Reddig and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am conducting a research study to investigate the perceptions of African American high school males on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. This study may provide in-depth understanding of how a teacher's culturally responsiveness contribute to improving academic and behavioral outcomes for African American male students. In addition, it may mediate the issues of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs, disciplinary referrals, school to prison pipeline and academic achievement.

I am seeking 10 African American high school males that would be willing to share their experiences with teachers' responsiveness to cultural diversity. Potential participants must (a) self-identify as African American male, (b) be at risks for academic challenges or receive special education services, (c) classify as a sophomore, junior, or senior, and (d) receive instruction in at least one general education class.

This study will consist of a virtual focus group session via Zoom. The focus group session will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Participation is confidential; however, the focus group discussions will be audio recorded. Your child's privacy will be protected, and confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. Focus groups do not allow for absolute guarantee for absolute confidentiality. The audio file will be password-protected and only accessible to the project research team. All respondents will be given pseudonyms to use during the focus group session and in the transcripts and labels for the recordings. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in the focus groups. Participation is voluntary and your child may withdraw from the study at any point.

If you are interested in your child participating in this study or if you have any questions, please email me at kmiddle1@uncc.edu or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Gloria Campbell-Whatley at gcampbe1@uncc.edu.

Information will be confidential, and participants' identifying information (name, age, grade, etc.) will never be shared with others or used in the published results.

This study well be conducted by Kim Reddig, a PhD doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

APPENDIX D: Telephone Script

Telephone Script

**This email will be used as the basis/foundation for the phone conversation with the parent and the student. The purpose of the conversation will be to answer any questions they may have. The conversation will begin using the content of the email (that describes the study) as a guide for the conversation.

Email to Parents/Students

My name is Kim Reddig and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am conducting a research study to investigate the perceptions of African American high school males on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. This study may provide in-depth understanding of how a teacher's culturally responsiveness contribute to improving academic and behavioral outcomes for African American male students. In addition, it may mediate the issues of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs, disciplinary referrals, school to prison pipeline and academic achievement.

I am seeking 10 African American high school males that would be willing to share their experiences with teachers' responsiveness to cultural diversity. Potential participants must (a) self-identify as African American male, (b) be at risks for academic challenges or receive special education services, (c) classify as a sophomore, junior, or senior, and (d) receive instruction in at least one general education class.

This study will consist of a virtual focus group session via Zoom. The focus group session will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Participation is confidential; however, the focus group discussions will be audio recorded. Your child's privacy will be protected, and confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. Focus groups do not allow for absolute guarantee for absolute confidentiality. The audio file will be password-protected and only accessible to the project research team. All respondents will be given pseudonyms to use during the focus group session and in the transcripts and labels for the recordings. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in the focus groups. Participation is voluntary and your child may withdraw from the study at any point.

If you are interested in your child participating in this study or if you have any questions, please email me at kmiddle1@uncc.edu or call XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Gloria Campbell-Whatley at gcampbe1@uncc.edu.

Information will be confidential, and participants' identifying information (name, age, grade, etc.) will never be shared with others or used in the published results.

This study well be conducted by Kim Reddig, a PhD doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

APPENDIX E: DocuSign Script

Script for DocuSign

Parental Consent

Thank you for your interest in this study. Per our communication, you are receiving this email from UNC Charlotte DocuSign to review and sign the parental consent form document. If you have additional questions before signing the parental consent form, please give me a call at XXX-XXX-XXXX. Once you have signed the parental consent document, UNC Charlotte DocuSign will return it to me upon completion.

Student Assent

Thank you for your interest in this study. Per our communication, you are receiving this email from UNC Charlotte DocuSign to review and sign the student assent form document. If you have additional questions before signing the student assent form, please give me a call at XXX-XXX-XXXX. Once you have signed the student assent document, UNC Charlotte DocuSign will return it to me upon completion.

APPENDIX F: Focus Group Notification

Email Sent for Notification of Focus Group

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group session. The purpose of this session is to determine the need for and the extent to which cultural responsiveness is a part of the curriculum and the African American male student's expereince, as well as, how these practices can be encouraged.

For this study **cultural diversity** is defined as the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a school setting.

We expect to conduct 2 groups of 5 participants.

The goal is to have focus groups sessions composed of high school African American males at-risk for academic challenges or receiving special education services.

 There will be no more than 5 people in a focus group. Your designated meeting place is:

Time: 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Place: Zoom

Focus Group: Group 1and 2

Your participation is confidential; however, the focus group discussions will be audio recorded. The audio file will be password-protected and only accessible to the project research team. All respondents will be given pseudonyms (i.e., fake names or numbers) in the transcripts and labels for the recordings of the focus groups. **Your responses are confidential, and no individual responses will be shared; only aggregated (combined) and non-identifiable data will be reported by the researcher.** There are no foreseeable risks associated with the focus groups. If you have questions or concerns about this project or how you are treated as a study participant you may contact Kim Reddig at kmiddle1@uncc.edu or the Research Compliance Office at UNC Charlotte at (704) 687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu at UNC Charlotte

 Prior to your scheduled focus group session you will be sent a link asking for basic demographic information such as age, grade, race, gender, , gender, disability, etc. You can complete this on your mobile smart phone or computer.

APPENDIX G: Parental Consent

UNC CHARLOTTE

Department of Special Education and Child Development
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

<u>**Parent or Legal Guardian Consent for Child/Minor Participation in Research**</u>

Title of the Project: African American Males Perceptions on Teacher Responsiveness to Cultural Diversity

Principal Investigator: Kim Reddig, Doctoral Candidate, UNC Charlotte

Faculty Advisor: Gloria Campbell-Whatley, Faculty, UNC Charlotte

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Your [child's/legal ward's] participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to allow your [child/legal ward] to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

<u>**Important Information You Need to Know**</u>

- The purpose of this study is to investigate African American high school males' perceptions on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity.

- Your child may participate in this study if they are a high school African American male at risk for academic challenges or special education services. Your child will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group session concerning their perceptions on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. Your child will be asked you to participate in one of two virtual focus group sessions via Zoom. Cameras will not be on during the focus group sessions to ensure your privacy. The focus group session will be audio-recorded. The session will occur once and it will last 45 minutes to 1 hour. Each participant will be given a pseudonym to use throughout the focus group session to protect your child's identity.

- Your will also be asked to provide basic demographic information (i.e., age, grade, etc.) prior to the virtual focus group session. Your child's identity will not be linked to this demographic information. All hard copies of this information will be destroyed (shredded) after the study has been completed. This virtual focus group session will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be professionally transcribed. Once the audio-recording is transcribed, the recording will be deleted.

- Some of the questions we'll ask your child are personal and sensitive. For example, we'll ask your child, when it comes to your teachers, how does your race affect your experience in the classroom? These questions are personal and your child might experience some mild emotional discomfort. Your child may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer. Your child will not personally benefit from taking part in this research but our study results may help us better understand the impact teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity has on African American male students.

- Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student.

- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a teacher's responsiveness to cultural diversity has on high school African American males at risk for academic challenges or special education services.

Why is your [child/legal ward] being asked to be in this research study.

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in this study because they are a high school African American male at-risk for academic challenges or special education services. Additionally, they are receiving educational services in at least one general education classroom.

What will children do in this study?

Your child will be asked to participate in one of two virtual focus group sessions via Zoom. Cameras will not be on during the focus group sessions to ensure privacy. The focus group session will be audio-recorded.

What benefits might children experience?

Taking part in this study may not have direct benefits to you or your child, but it will help me learn more ways to enable teachers to utilize culturally responsive teaching to improve academic and behavioral outcomes of African American males.

What risks might children experience?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:

- The child may be uncomfortable answering the focus group questions.
- The time the child spends for participating in the study might be considered an inconvenience.
- There might be a risk of possible loss of confidentiality. This is the case during focus groups where the participant's responses will be heard by other participants in the study.

How will information be protected?

Your child's responses will be confidential. Participants will be assigned participant numbers during the focus group session. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be used. Results will only be shared in aggregate form. The data will be stored in a password protected computer. The researcher and the research team will have access to the data and the data will be retained for a period of 5 years after the project is completed. Hard copies of the data will be shredded and the digital files will be erased.

How will information be used after the study is over?

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be used. Results will only be shared in summarized form.

Will [children/legal wards] receive an incentive for taking part in this study?

Your child will not receive any payment for being in this study.

What other choices are there if I don't want my [child/legal ward] to take part in this study?

Your alternative to your child taking part in the study is to choose for your child not to participate.

What are my [child's/legal ward's] rights if they take part in this study?

Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to allow your child to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop their participation at any time. You and your child will be in penalized in any way for not participating in this study.

Who can answer my questions about this study and participant rights?

For questions about this research, you may contact Kim Reddig, kmiddle1@uncc.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX and Gloria Campbell-Whatley, faculty advisor, at gcampbe1@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about research participant's rights, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s),

please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Parent or Legally Authorized Representative Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to child's participation in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree for my child to take part in this study.

Consent to be audio recorded

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be audio recorded. Your child's name will not be used during recording. Each child will be given a pseudonym (i.e., participant number) to use throughout the virtual focus group session.

Participants have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options:

_____I consent to the use of audio recording.

_____I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

_____

Participant Name (PRINT)

_____

Parent/Legally Authorized Representative Name and Relationship to Participant (PRINT)

_____

Signature   Date

_____

Name and Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

APPENDIX H: Student Assent 15 – 17 Years Old

UNC CHARLOTTE

Department of Special Education and Child Development
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
T /704-687-8828 f/ 704-687-1625

Student Assent Form – 15 -17 years old

Study Title: African American Males Perceptions of Teacher's Responsiveness to Cultural Diversity

 My name is Kim Reddig and I am a student at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Research studies are done to find better ways of helping and understanding people or to get information about how things work. Your decision to be in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. This form will give you information about the risks and benefits of this study so that you can make a better decision about whether you want to take part or not.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to investigate the perceptions of high school African American males of teacher's responsiveness to cultural diversity. You are being asked to be in this study because you self-identify as an African American male in high school and is at risk for academic challenges or special education services. You will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group session via Zoom.

PROCEDURES

You will be in the virtual focus group session this for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

In this research study you will participate in a virtual focus group session via Zoom for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. You will be asked questions during the focus group session and will be given an opportunity to answer them. Your responses will be confidential. Participants will be assigned participant numbers during the focus group session. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. You will also be asked to provide basic demographic information (i.e., age, grade, etc.) prior to the virtual focus group session. Your identity will not be linked to this demographic information. All hard copies of this information will be destroyed (shredded) after the study has been completed. This virtual focus group session will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be professionally transcribed. Once the audio-recording is transcribed, the recording will be deleted.

 We will do everything possible to make sure your data or records are protected and kept confidential (not shared with others).

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks from participating in this study may include you being uncomfortable when answering the focus group questions, possible loss of confidentiality as with the case during focus groups where student responses will be heard by other participants. To try to prevent the risks from affecting you, if you become uncomfortable during the focus group session, you do not have to answer the question(s). You can opt out of the study at any time.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You may not get any direct benefits from being in this study.   However, others may benefit in the future because of what the researchers learned from this study.

For further information about this study, please refer to the consent form discussed with your parent or guardian for this study.

This study has been explained to your parent/parents/guardian and they have given permission for you to be in the study if you want to take part. If you have any questions about this study, please ask your parents/guardian or call the researcher, Kim Reddig, at kmiddle1@uncc.edu, or XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can also call the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or by email at uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

 If you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

_____   _____

Name (printed) of Participant and Signature   Date

 Check which applies below *[to be completed by the person obtaining the assent]*

{C}{C}   The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as
            documentation of assent to take part in this study.

{C}{C}   The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally
            explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator/Person Obtaining Assent   Date

APPENDIX I: Adult Consent Form

UNC CHARLOTTE

Department of Special Education and Child Development
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

<u>**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**</u>

Title of the Project: African American Males Perceptions on Teacher Responsiveness to Cultural Diversity

Principal Investigator: Kim Reddig, Doctoral Candidate, UNC Charlotte

Faculty Advisor: Gloria Campbell-Whatley, Faculty, UNC Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

<u>**Important Information You Need to Know**</u>

- The purpose of this study is to investigate African American high school males' perceptions on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity.

- You may participate in this study if you are a high school African American male at risk for academic challenges or special education services. You will be asked to participate in a virtual focus group session concerning your perceptions on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. You will be asked to participate in one of two virtual focus group sessions via Zoom. Cameras will not be on during the focus group sessions to ensure your privacy. The focus group session will be audio-recorded. The session will occur once and it will last 45 minutes to 1 hour. Each participant will be given a pseudonym to use throughout the focus group session to protect your identity.

- You will also be asked to provide basic demographic information (i.e., age, grade, etc.) prior to the virtual focus group session. Your identity will not be linked to this demographic information. All hard copies of this information will be destroyed (shredded) after the study has been completed. This virtual focus group session will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be professionally transcribed. Once the audio-recording is transcribed, the recording will be deleted.

- Some of the questions we'll ask you are personal and sensitive. For example, we'll ask you when it comes to your teachers, how does your race affect your experience in the classroom? These questions are personal and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer. You will not personally benefit from taking part in this research but our study results may help us better understand the impact teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity has on African American male students.

- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student.

- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of a teacher's responsiveness to cultural diversity has on high school African American males at risk for academic challenges or special education services.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a high school African American male at-risk for academic challenges or special education services. Additionally, you are receiving educational services in at least one general education classroom.

What will happen if I take part in this study?

You will be asked to participate in one of two virtual focus group sessions via Zoom. Cameras will not be on during the focus group sessions to ensure privacy. The focus group session will be audio-recorded.

What benefits might I experience?

Taking part in this study may not have direct benefits to you, but it will help me learn more ways to enable teachers to utilize culturally responsive teaching to improve academic and behavioral outcomes of African American males.

What risks might I experience?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:

- You may be uncomfortable answering the focus group questions.

- The time you spend for participating in the study might be considered an inconvenience.
- There might be a risk of possible loss of confidentiality. This is the case during focus groups where the participant's responses will be heard by other participants in the study.

How will my information be protected?

Your responses will be confidential. Participants will be assigned participant numbers during the focus group session. Due to the nature of focus groups, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. Results will only be shared in aggregate form. The data will be stored in a password protected computer. The researcher and the research team will have access to the data and the data will be retained for a period of 5 years after the project is completed. Hard copies of the data will be shredded and the digital files will be erased.

How will my information be used after the study is over?

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. Results will only be shared in summarized form.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?

You will not receive any payment for being in this study.

What other choices do I have if I don't take part in this study?

Your alternative to your taking part in the study is to choose not to participate.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop their participation at any time. You will be in penalized in any way for not participating in this study.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

For questions about this research, you may contact Kim Reddig, kmiddle1@uncc.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX and Gloria Campbell-Whatley, faculty advisor, at gcampbe1@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about research participant's rights, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

<u>Consent to Participate</u>

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

<u>Consent to be audio recorded</u>

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be audio recorded. Your name will not be used during recording. Each participant will be given a pseudonym (i.e., participant number) to use throughout the virtual focus group session.

Participants have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options:

_____I consent to the use of audio recording.

_____I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

_____

Name (PRINT)

_____

Signature   Date

_____

Name & Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

APPENDIX J: Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Part 1: Introductory Protocol

I appreciate you being here with me today to talk about perception on teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. You are participating in this focus group session today because you are a high school African American male receiving special education services or at risk for academic challenges. The focus group questions I will ask today will allow you to share your experiences as it pertains to your teacher responsiveness to cultural diversity. If at any time you get uncomfortable during the focus group session, you can decline to answer or withdraw from the study. You can do so by sending me a private message in the chat. To ensure privacy, everyone has been given a participant number. When speaking, please be sure to state your participant number before answering the questions. I will also be including your participant number whenever I refer to you. There is no foreseeable risk associated with participating in this study. This session will be audio-recorded to allow me to capture all that is said during this session. You have indicated that you are willing to be audio recorded during this session. If you have changed your mind, please let me know at this time. When necessary, I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will use a professional transcription company to transcribe the audio file. I will begin audio recording for this session now. You should have heard the message, "This session is being recorded."

This session has been planned for approximately 45-60 minutes. I have several questions to ask during this time period. Before we get started, for the purpose of this study **Cultural Diversity** is defined as the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a school

setting. When answering the questions, please think about a teacher who is of a culture different from your own. For example, think of a teacher who is <u>not</u> African American.

Part 2: Questioning

1. Tell me a bit about your thoughts with education in the classroom and race. For example, what are the interactions between students of different races, teachers of different races, etc.

2. Tell me a little about a teacher acknowledging and accepting cultures others than their own.

3. Give me an example of when a teacher used students' culture in the work you were doing in class.
   Follow-up question: Can anyone tell me about a time when a teacher incorporated your culture into the lesson? How did that make you feel? Why?
   Follow-up question: Can you say a bit about if/how that impacted your academic achievement/school success?

4. Tell me about a time when you had a positive connection with your teacher. What characteristics did he/she have that allowed you to connect to him/her?
   Follow-up question: Did this teacher get to know about you and your culture?

5. Tell me about a time when you felt disconnected or excluded in the classroom because of your race.

6. What gets in the way with your chance to do well in school? How does race make a difference in that?

7. When it comes to your teachers, how does your race affect your experience in the classroom? Follow-up question: Has your teacher ever made a comment to you specifically because your race?

8. What strategies did your teachers use to make instruction fun, interesting, or meaningful students?

9. Do you have anything else you would like to share?