

Spring 2010

The Role of Teacher Expectation on Disproportionality of African American Males in Special Education in Middle Schools in Richmond County School System

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THE ROLE OF TEACHER EXPECTATION ON DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN MALES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RICHMOND COUNTY MIDDLE
SCHOOLS

by

CLAUDETTE JACKSON PALMER

(Under the Direction of Brenda Marina)

ABSTRACT

This research study examined the problems of disproportionality of African American males in special education in middle schools in Richmond County, Georgia. Disproportionality occurs when the risk for being identified in a particular disability category is not proportional to the population being considered. The issue of disproportionality of African American males and other minority students in special education has been studied and debated well over thirty years and today continues to be a problem for the education community. The purpose of this study was to understand the role teacher expectations play in disproportionality of African American males in special education. Referral data from 2007 Richmond County School System was used to identify the middle schools with the most referrals of African American males to special education. Qualitative research methods were used consisting of school statistical information and interviews with general education and special education teachers who are employed by the school district and received their teaching certification through the traditional or alternative route. The data collected were coded, analyzed and discussed with program participants. The Office of Special Education and Georgia Department of Education uses the risk ratio as the preferred method of calculating disproportionality. Risk ratio answers the question, "What is a

specific racial/ethnic group's risk of receiving special education and related services for a particular disability as compared to the risk for all other students?" The data revealed that African American male students in special education in this school district are disproportionately represented in the disability category of Mild Intellectual Disabilities (MIID).

Findings from this study are organized into four categories: Category 1: African American males' representation in special education, Category 2: Disproportionality at the middle school level, Category 3: Teacher expectation and its role in influencing/shaping disproportionality, and Category 4: Teacher background, training, experience, teacher certification and referral to special education. It is concluded from this study that low or no teacher expectation, student demographics, behavioral issues, teacher training and experience contribute to the disproportionality of African American males in special education in this school district.

INDEX WORDS: Special education, Disproportionality, African American males, Overrepresentation, Richmond county schools.

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AMERICAN MALES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN RICHMOND
COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2010

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May 2010

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of my family and friends who have encouraged me through my pursuit of higher education. First, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to accept the things that I could not change, the courage to change the things that I could and the wisdom to know the difference.

To my husband Willie, the journey has been long and hard, but I will be forever grateful that you were always right by my side. I appreciate the encouragement you gave me to continue even during the times that I wanted to quit.

To my son, William, although you say that I have been in school all of your life. I hope that I have instilled in you the importance of getting a good education and being the very best person that you can be. I hope that I have shown you that you can achieve anything you set out to achieve if you work hard at it. I also thank you for being patient with me during my studies and writing of this dissertation. I love you with all of my heart and thank God for you each day.

To my parents, Isaac and Dorothy Jackson Jr., words cannot express my gratitude for your love, support and guidance throughout my life. I will always be eternally grateful to you for the many lessons that you have taught me and continue to teach me about love for God, family and friends. I am proud to have you as my parents.

I especially want to thank Dr. Dorothy Gandy for believing in me and giving me the inspiration to strive to be the best that I can be. Through her continued motivation, encouragement and praise, I have completed this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Brenda Marina, for your expertise in guiding me through this process. You were always very helpful and provided me with immediate feedback and valuable information to complete this process. I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to accept my invitation to serve as my chair.

Thank you to Dr. Simone Charles and Dr. Karelle Aiken for serving on my committee. I appreciate your acceptance to serve on my committee and your guidance through the writing of my dissertation.

Appreciation is also expressed to all of my professors in the Educational Leadership Department at Georgia Southern University. You provided me with valuable lessons and information that was the foundation in me completing this final project.

Special thanks are given to the 16 study participants for their willingness to share their perceptions, knowledge and beliefs regarding the research topic. Without their cooperation, this project would not have been completed.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mrs. Johnnetta Godbee for all the assistance she provided me as I took the final steps towards my journey's end.

Finally, I thank my study partner, Dr. Ruth Odum. Thank you for your friendship, support and encouragement through this journey. I am eternally grateful that I had you to make it through. Your constant motivation, long hours of telephone support and encouragement allowed me to finish this journey. Words can never express my gratitude for your friendship and support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Education (NEA, 2007) indicated that for decades there has been much research and debate of questions such as: Does disproportionality of African American males in special education constitute a problem? What factors contribute to the disproportionality of African American males in special education programs? Are African American males placed in special education programs to better meet their needs, or do cultural, economic, and political issues impact these classification decisions? These questions are yet unresolved.

In schools across the country, African American males are being educated in special education programs at much higher rates than their representation in the total school population (Kunjufu, 1986 & Piland, 2002). Racial disparities in special education programs have sparked much concern within the education community (Piland, 2002). Educators and parents know that the decision to identify a child as disabled, particularly if they come from diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds, has lifelong implications (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). Some of their concerns include: 1) the placement of African American males into segregated settings, 2) the questionable benefits of their placement in special education and 3) the detrimental effects of labeling a child as special needs. In addition, the high dropout rate, increased chance of incarceration and the limited career preparation and employability are the long-term effects of repeated placement of African American males in special education.

African American males face unique challenges that may compromise their success in school. African American males are often described using disparaging terms such as

dysfunctional, lazy, uneducatable, or dangerous (Gibbs, 1988). The author indicated that these terms reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate the “invisibility” of Black men. Often such stereotypes shape the perceptions and expectations of principals and teachers. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that some Black men internalize such negative beliefs which, in turn become “self-threatening” and work to compromise their success (Steele, 1997).

Reports from the United States Office of Civil Rights and Office of Special Education Programs continue to document the problem of disproportionality (Arnold & Lassman, 2003). Strayhorn (1985) found teachers, on average, hold lower expectations for African American males. Teachers’ low expectations often lead to student disengagement which, in turn, lowers the teacher’s expectations further. Strayhorn (1985) described this as a vicious cycle downwards. In contrast, Baron, Tom & Cooper (1985) found that teachers had higher expectations of African American male students compared to white students. Their findings revealed no statistically significant difference in the relationship between teacher expectations and the success and achievement of African American male students. Given these findings, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the role teacher expectations play in the disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. Findings from this study will help to unravel this long standing dilemma of African American males being overrepresented in special education programs.

Background of the Problem

Disproportionality is defined as the “overrepresentation” and “under-representation” of particular populations or demographic groups. According to the United States Department of Education (2006), approximately 13.5 percent of all students in K-12 schools received special

education services in 2006. Losen and Orfield (2002) reported that across the nation, African American males accounted for only 14.8 percent of the general population of 6 to 21 year old students, but they make up 20 percent of the special education population across all disabilities. Jordan (2005) claimed that African American males nationwide are nearly three times more likely than white males to be labeled mentally retarded, almost two times more likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed, and almost one and a half times more likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and not included in the general education classroom.

The issue of disproportionate representation of African American males in special education has been discussed in the professional literature as early as 1968 (Arnold, Lassman, Valenqualia, Copeland & Huaging , 2006). The passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, both the profession and the United States Court System attempted to address the issue of overrepresentation of African American males and other minorities in special education (Arnold, Lassman, Valenqualia, Copeland & Huaging, 2006). Their concerns were related to inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes, which potentially result from ineffective education. Public Law 94-142 is an Act that was implemented in 1975 to assure that all handicapped children have available to them, a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, to assure that the rights of handicapped children and their parents or guardians are protected, to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all handicapped children, and to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts.

In 1968, Lloyd Dunn was one of the first researchers to study the problem of disproportionality of students in classes for students with mild mental retardation (Zhiang &

Katsiyannis, 2002). Dunn argued that 60-80 percent of special education students encompasses what he described as “socio-culturally deprived” children from poor broken homes, and low socio-economic groups. Dunn believed that the large number of African American males being placed in segregated classrooms for the mentally retarded was influenced by the passage of compulsory education legislation which requires by law, children to receive education and governments to provide it. Before compulsory free education existed, most children were denied access to basic education. As a result of compulsory education, illiteracy is greatly reduced and knowledge and academic knowledge is increased.

Piland (2002) discussed a report from the President’s Committee on Mental Retardation entitled, “The Six-Hour Retarded Child”. The report corroborated Dunn’s 1968 charge by finding that a significant number of poor, inner city children were inappropriately identified as mildly mentally retarded and being served in special education classrooms separate from the mainstream population. In addition, the report further indicated many; mostly poor minority children were being identified as “retarded” only for the educational problems they encountered during the six-hour school day. Dunn also believed that in non-school settings and communities these children were seen by parents, peers, and neighbors as having normal intellectual and adaptive abilities (Piland, 2002).

Since 1975 there has been a steady increase in the number of African American males receiving special education services (Essex, 2005; Whorton, 2002). The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational System (2004) criticized the increase in the number of African American students receiving special education services because they believed these students were not getting the most appropriate public education in the least restrictive

environment. The federal government, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1979) mandated that all states monitor disproportionality by collecting data on enrollment in special education and taking steps to reduce disproportionality wherever it existed (Courtinho & Oswald, 2002). IDEA Amendment of 2004 mandated that all states effect systems and policies that will eliminate or decrease the overrepresentation of any particular ethnic group in special education (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

National Statistics of African American Males in Special Education

Ghedham (2000) conducted a study which focused on the Southern region of the United States (Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi) and found that more than one-half of all African American students attending k-12 public schools are in the South.

Ghedham (2002) reported that in these southern states, African American males are estimated to be overrepresented in special education programs for mild disabilities. Mild disabilities is defined by Individuals With Disabilities Act as one who exhibits significantly sub-average intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affect educational performance and is manifested during the developmental period. In the state of Georgia, African American males identified as mild intellectually disabled, constitute 84 percent of African American males in special education programs (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

According to educator, author, speaker and activist Jawanza Kunjufu (2005) special education is a 60 billion dollar industry and 12 percent of United States public school students are labeled special education students. Kunjufu (2005) reported that national statistics regarding special education placement and African American males and their disproportionate placement

in special education programs represent 17 percent of the general school population; greater than 30 percent of the special education population, and 80 percent of these students are black males. This author argued that most school districts have a declining general population but an increasing special education population.

Causes of Disproportionality

The problem of disparate representation in special education is very complex and most likely results from numerous factors functioning both separately and jointly (Bollmer, Bethel, Garrison-Morgan, & Brauen, 2007). Bollmer et.al, (2007) agreed that learning more about causative factors may provide a better understanding of the problem of disproportionality. This author purported that developing potential solutions will ensure that students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have the opportunity to receive an appropriate education. According to the National Education Association (2002), disproportionality exists in various forms and at different levels. Disproportionality or overrepresentation of one population as compared to others can be present in any or all of the following ways:

- National, state and district level over-representation of certain populations as disabled or under-identification as gifted and/or talented
- Higher incidence rates for certain populations in specific special education categories such as mental retardation or emotional disturbance
- Significant differences in the proportion of minority students who are receiving special education services in more restrictive or segregated programs
- Excessive incidence duration and types of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions experienced by minority students

Numerous causal factors have been researched regarding the disproportionality of African American males. Some of the factors include race and gender, poverty, teacher referral, behavior, lack of cultural awareness, and teacher expectations.

Race and Gender. A child's race, ethnicity and gender significantly influence the child's probability of being misidentified, misclassified, and inappropriately placed in special education programs (Piland, 2002). Research shows the relationship between race and ethnicity and other variables for students' placement in special education classes.

Piland (2002) discussed gender as a possible cause of disproportionality in special education for African American males. The researcher reported that across the nation, a higher percentage of male students are being served in special education settings. African American males have the highest risk of placement in special education programs in comparison to their white and female counterparts (Piland, 2002). Fierros and Conroy (2002) agreed that African American males are more likely to be placed in restrictive special education settings than their Caucasian counterparts.

Approximately two-thirds of the students receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are boys (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The disproportional representation of boys to girls is most striking in the areas of emotional disturbance and mental retardation. Some data suggest, however, that the gender ratio may vary from school district to school district (Vaishnav & Dedman, 2002). Three theories, referred to as the “three B’s” by Coutinho, Oswald and King (2001), have emerged to explain the gender differences for special education identification rates:

- biological differences between girls and boys;

- behavioral differences between girls and boys; and
- bias in special education referral and assessment procedures.

Thus far, researchers have not found a clear explanation for the causes of gender differences in special education identification (Coutinho, Oswald, & King, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). These authors are not certain as to whether boys are over-represented and/or if girls are under-represented, or if some gender disparities are appropriate (Coutinho, Oswald, & King, 2001).

Poverty. According to Losen and Orfield (2002), poverty has been found to contribute to a heightened incidence of disability among African American males. The highly negative effects of poverty leave many of these students exposed to environmental stressors, and less “ready” for school. Losen and Orfield (2002) claimed that since minority students are disproportionately exposed to impoverished environments, it seems likely that poverty contributes to the disproportionality of minority students in special education. Skiba (2008) reported that the U.S. Census (2001) indicated because minority students are more likely to be exposed to poverty in American society; the risk factors associated with poverty will result in increased academic underachievement and emotional/behavioral problems among minority students, thus increasing the risk of minority referral to special education. A number of demographic factors related to geographical location and socio-economic status have been shown to be associated with student’s educational achievement or early cognitive development. These include neighborhood and housing stability; the student’s home environment; family health care; and geographic location (Skiba, 2008). The effects of poverty on early cognitive development, school achievement, and socio-emotional functioning are dependent on the

duration, timing, and neighborhood context of poverty; deep and persistent poverty consistently predicts more deleterious effects. The 2002 National Research Council panel exploring disproportionality in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002) affirmed that biological and social/ environmental factors that disproportionately affect minority students have been found to contribute to poor cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Studies that have examined the impact of poverty on special education have obtained results that both support a direct relationship and deny its reality. What is consistent in these investigations according to Losen & Orfield, (2002) is that the relationship between poverty and special education placement is complex and generally other variables are involved. An explanation of disproportionality based on poverty alone cannot account for the findings that disproportionality is greater in the judgmental categories (i.e., emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded and specific learning disabled) than in the more biologically based disability categories (Losen & Orfield, 2002). In contrast, a study conducted by Kerns, Ford, & Linney, (2005) of school psychologists' perception of disproportionality of African American males, poverty was found to be a contributing factor to disproportionality. These authors reported that children living in poverty may not have many opportunities to engage in stimulating experiences that have been correlated with high intelligence. Oswald (1999) agreed with Kerns et.al (2005), and attributed disproportionality to the poverty rate increase and argued that more African American males are identified as having mild mental retardation as compared to their white male counterparts. Skiba (2003) disputed the theory that poverty is a contributing factor in disproportionality. This researcher purported that poverty is believed to be a weak and inconsistent predictor of disproportionality.

Teacher referral. The process of identifying students for special education services begins with the student's teachers, principals, or counselors referring the student to special education. These referrals generally are a result of students showing difficulties in general curriculum classrooms manifested due to poor academic performance or behavior problems. Multiple studies demonstrated that a child's race and ethnicity were significantly related to probability that he or she would be referred to special education and inappropriately identified as disabled (National Research Council, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002). Teacher referral was found to be a strong predictor of eligibility and disproportionality for special education services (Harry & Klinger, 2006). These authors reported that seventy three to ninety percent of African American males referred by classroom teachers for special education evaluations due to academic problems are found eligible for services. Reviewing records of students referred for special education evaluation in an urban school system, Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Trongone (1991) found that teachers referred minority children more often than non-minority children and tended to refer minority students for behavioral rather than academic issues. In a meta-analysis of 10 studies between 1975 and 2000 examining referral to special education, Hosp & Reschly (2003) found that both African American and Latino students were referred more often to special education than White students.

Behavior. Nationally, African American males are overrepresented on indexes of school discipline ranging from classroom penalties, such as verbal reprimands, to institutional punishments including suspensions and expulsions (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher 2000; Gouldner 1979). In a study conducted by Zimmerman (2005), findings suggested that behavior likely increased or contributed to a child being referred for special education consideration. McMillan,

Gresham, Lopez, & Bocian (1996) studied a group of students in grades 2 through 4 who were identified for pre-referral intervention and found that, in addition to their low achievement; the students demonstrated more behavior problems than were typically found with students their age. These authors found that African American students were referred for behavior problems at a higher rate than any other ethnic group. African American males who were identified as having behavior problems were believed to be at higher risk for placement in special education programs (McMillan et.al, 1996). Moran (2003) supported the findings of the previous researchers and reported that behavior is considered a factor in African American males being referred to special education. Shaw and Braden (1990) concluded that the possibility exists that higher rates of school exclusion and punishment for African-American students are due to correspondingly high rates of disruptive behavior. In such a case, disproportionality in suspension or other punishments would represent not racial bias, but a relatively appropriate response to disproportionate misbehavior. Although there have been no studies directly investigating this hypothesis, investigations of behavior, race, and discipline have yet to provide evidence that African-American students misbehave at a significantly higher rate than their white counterparts. Shaw and Braden (1990) reported that although black children received a disproportionate share of disciplinary referrals and corporal punishment, white children tended to be referred for disciplinary action for more severe rule violations than black children. McCarthy and Hoge (1987) found that black students reported receiving higher rates of sanctions for all disciplinary measures studied; yet the only two behaviors that showed significant differences between white and black students across both years of that study— “skipped class” and “carved desk”—indicated higher rates of misbehavior for white students.

Lack of Cultural Awareness. The ignorance of cultural differences is also a factor in contributing to disparities in special education for African American males (Serwatka, Dove, & Hodge, 1986). In the area of cultural differences, Hilliard (1980) pointed out that professionals in education may view cultural differences among African American male students as an indicator of deficiencies. This perception can lead to a student being identified as being below normal or abnormal on measures of adaptive behaviors. Gilbert and Gay (1985) suggest that African American students who are misdiagnosed and misplaced are often having difficulty in the regular classroom because this education environment is not set up to meet the needs of culturally different students. Placement in special education classes do little if anything to solve the original problem. This is because special education classrooms are likewise not set up to meet the needs of students with cultural differences. Thus, the African American male student who is placed in special education classrooms, because of displayed cultural differences, eventually will begin to display the characteristics of a disabled student (Serwatka, et al. 1985).

Teacher expectations. Teacher expectation is another variable that has been associated with disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. In an article by Kunjufu, (2008) the author suggested that teacher expectations, even when based on erroneous information, can influence the academic performance of children, especially African American males. Schugurensky (1968) article (as cited in Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) discussed the book written by Robert Rosenthal, a Harvard University professor, and Leonore Jacobson, a principal of an elementary school in San Francisco “Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectations and pupils’ intellectual development”. These authors borrowed the term “Pygmalion effect” from a play by George Bernard Shaw in which a professor’s high

expectations radically transformed the educational performance of a lower-class girl. The main argument of their book was that the expectations that teachers have about their students can unwittingly influence their behavior. These authors argued that this influence or “self-fulfilling prophecy” could have a positive or negative impact on a student’s intellectual development.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) and Barrett (2007) contended that when teachers expect students to do well, students tend to do well; when teachers expect students to fail, students tend to fail.

Ryan (2006) pointed out that student achievement was thought to be directly related to the teacher’s expectations for a student. He further suggested that “broad” social and institutional issues influenced the pedagogical practices of schools and teachers and therefore plays a role in a teacher’s perceptions and expectations of a student. Ryan (2006) contended that the nature of these issues leads to teachers holding certain perceptions and expectations of students from certain demographic groups. Lumsden (1997) claimed all schools hold high expectations for all students, however, in reality, what is professed is not always practiced. Lumsden further stated that although some schools and teachers maintain uniformly high expectations for all students, others have “great expectations” for particular segments of the student population but minimal expectations for others. Lumsden (1997) affirmed that in many urban and inner-city schools, low expectations predominate. Rubie-Davies (2006) indicated that it is a known fact that teacher expectations exists and it is through those expectations that certain learning opportunities are provided for students depending on the teacher’s high or low expectation of their students. This author deemed that teacher expectation has a stronger effect from teacher to student than from student to teacher. Barrett (2007) claimed that the foundation for student success is determined by the ability of teachers to communicate high expectations and

to hold positive attitudes for all students. Lumsden (2000) agreed and concluded that a teacher's unconscious biases and assumptions about students potential have a substantial effect on performance, as low expectation students are given fewer opportunities to perform. Ryan (2006) echoed the sentiments of Lumsden (1997) and agreed that when teachers hold low expectations for certain students based on their race and socioeconomic status they are perpetuating the disproportionate numbers of children identified with specific disabilities and placed in more restricted environments.

In contrast, Baird, Pavelsky, Savage, and Valburg (2008) also claimed that a lack of family involvement is a barrier to student achievement. Ma (2001) contended that it is not only the expectations of the teachers that matter but that of the parents as well. This author further contended that it is vital for schools and teachers to encourage parents to get involved with their children and set high standards for them in order to promote success at home. These authors indicated that low levels of parental involvement often becomes insurmountable obstacles for students and ultimately result in low achievement.

Skiba et.al (2003) debated and concluded that while there has been extensive documentation and debates that socio demographic issues associated with poverty, gender, behavioral issues, teacher referrals and unequal educational opportunities for students of color and disadvantaged students, are causal factors related to disproportionality of African American males, there is little evidence of the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality of African American males in special education. The researcher argued that teacher expectations has a direct relationship to student achievement and plays a major role in the academic achievement of all students. Therefore, further investigation into the role teacher expectations

have on disproportionality of African American males in special education is warranted to gain a deeper understanding of this long standing problem of African American males being overrepresented in special education programs.

Teacher Background Training and Experience

Teacher background characteristics are critical factors in the success or failure of school reform and student achievement (Rist, 1970). In addition, characteristics such as gender and ethnicity/race as well as achieved factors such as certification, education level, and experience are also important to these issues (Rist, 1970). Today, teachers enter the profession in one of three ways: the traditional teacher certificate, alternative teacher certificate, or emergency teacher certificate. Within each are variations in program activities, program length, and duration of the certification. Some authors also refer to provisional or temporary certification, which typically means a teacher has satisfied the requirements of a standard certificate but either has little or no teaching experience (or no recent experience), or has taught in a different locale. Traditional teacher certificates require teachers to earn a bachelor's degree in education, and to have finished student teaching under the direction of a supervisor or master/mentor teacher. Alternate routes to certification often ask that participants have at minimum a bachelor's degree, but the degree need not be in education. The emergency teacher certificates do not require teachers to have a college degree (The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, 2002).

There was no research found that discussed the role teacher experience/training has on the disproportionality of African American males in special education. This researcher will gain information from the perspective of general education and special education teachers who have

entered the field of education through either the traditional approach or the alternative certification route to answer the research sub question: How do teacher background, training and experience influence their decision to refer African American males to special education?

Disproportionality in Georgia

The Georgia Department of Education makes a determination for significant disproportionality to demonstrate compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Each state that receives assistance under IDEA must provide for the collection and examination of data to determine if significant disproportionality, based on race and ethnicity, is occurring in the state and the local educational agencies (LEAs) of the state with respect to:

- (1) The identification of children as children with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment.
- (2) The placement in particular educational setting of such children; and
- (3) The incidence, duration and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions.

Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) defines significant disproportionality as having an N size of 20 or greater and a weighted risk ratio of 4.0 and above for the identification, placement, and/or discipline of students with disabilities. Determination for significant disproportionality is made based upon the December 1 Federal Child Count (618 Data). The December 1 count of students with disabilities is conducted to fulfill federal reporting requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Data is collected for the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Annual Report to Congress. This data included the number of all eligible children with Individual

Education Plans (IEP) on December 1 of each year. The State Department of Education contacts each school system in Georgia during the spring of the school year; and schools found to have disproportionate representation must provide Early Intervening Services (EIS) during the next fiscal year. Depending on the total school enrollment, the December 1 count may vary from year to year.

A risk ratio is used to determine disproportionality in special education. The risk ratio when applied to a disability type, answers the question “What is a specific racial/ethnic group’s risk of receiving special education and related services for a particular disability as compared to the risk for all students?” The risk ratio for non disabled students uses the district level risks for each racial/ethnic group composition of the state. Risk ratios are not reported if there are fewer than 20 students in the racial/ethnic group of interest enrolled in the district, or if the racial/ethnic group of interest comprises 85 percent or greater of the district enrollment. The weighted risk ratio uses the district level risk for the racial/ethnic group for the numerator and a weighted risk for all other non disabled students for the denominator. Weighted risk ratios are reported on students ages 6-21 for all disabilities and six individual disability types. There is no risk up to a ratio of 1.19. There is risk between ratios 1.20 and 1.99 and disproportionate risk between 2.00 and 2.99 (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

The equation for the risk ratio is as follows:

Risk ratio = Risk for racial/ethnic group divided by risk for comparison group

For example, to calculate the risk ratio for African American students for the Intellectual disability category, the risk for African American students for Intellectual disabilities is divided

by the risk for all other students (i.e., all students who are not African American) for Intellectual Disabilities.

A risk ratio of 1.00 indicates no difference between the racial/ethnic group and the comparison group. In other words, the racial/ethnic group is no more likely than are students from all other racial/ethnic groups to receive special education and related services for a particular disability. A risk ratio greater than 1.00 indicates that the risk for the racial/ethnic group is greater than the risk for the comparison group, whereas a risk ratio less than 1.00 indicates that the risk for the racial/ ethnic group is less than the risk for the comparison group.

The advantage of the risk ratio over other measures is that it is easier to interpret when used alone. For example, the risk index for one racial/ethnic group is only meaningful when compared with risks for other groups, since there is no established norm for risk of disability, and there tends to be a correlation between risk of identification for different demographic groups, at least when state-level data are considered (Westat, 2003). Similarly, the racial/ethnic composition of the disability category must be compared with the underlying demographic distribution to assess the extent of disproportionality. The risk ratio provides a unit less measure that can be evaluated without reference to other data.

African American males identified as mild intellectually disabled, constitute 84 percent of African American males in special education program in the state of Georgia. The 2006-2007 School Year Report from the State of Georgia reflected a risk ratio of 1.03 for African American students in all disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). The risk ratio for White students in the state of Georgia is 1.13 in the same broad category of emotional or behavior disorders. African American students have a risk ratio of 1.44 as compared to 0.99 for White

students and 1.17 for Alaskan/American Indian and 0.15 for Asian/Pacific Islander students for intellectual disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). In the category of Intellectual Disabilities, the risk ratio for African American students is 2.35, compared to 0.53 for White students (Georgia Department of Education, (GDOE), 2007). These statistics suggested that African American students are at risk of disproportionate representation in intellectual disabilities (mental retardation) and at risk in the behavioral and emotional disorders category.

Disproportionality in Richmond County School District

Richmond County is the second largest and oldest city in Georgia with a population of approximately 200,000 and is situated along the Savannah River. The district is comprised of 73 percent African American, 1 percent Asian, 2 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Multi Racial and 22 percent White students in the school district. According to data obtained from the Richmond County Board of Education web site in 2007, the district served 32,368 students, sixty nine percent economically disadvantaged, and twelve percent of students with disabilities.

Data from 2007- 2008 indicated that Richmond County school district had an overrepresentation of African Americans identified with intellectual disabilities and receiving special education services. Based on data for students with disabilities in Richmond County, no disproportionality existed in students identified with intellectual disabilities in 2006 based on the weighted risk ratio. According to Georgia Department of Education (2007), intellectual disabilities is defined as significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning which exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affect education performance and is manifested during the developmental period. A student may be classified as having an intellectual disability when a comprehensive evaluation indicates deficits in both intellectual

functioning and adaptive behavior. Data from 2007 Richmond County School System indicated that Richmond County's risk ratio for intellectual disabilities is 2.13 for African American students, which is considered disproportionate risk. Data from 2007 indicated a total of 3,938 students with disabilities in Richmond County school system. Of this total, 2,744 are African American, 535 of these students are identified as mild intellectually disabled, with 461 (81 percent) being identified as African American and mildly intellectually disabled. White students identified as mildly intellectually disabled totals 62 students, which is 11 percent of the population of students identified as mildly intellectually disabled (GDOE, 2007).

Richmond County schools uses SEMSTracker which is a management system that monitors students with disabilities enrolled in special education programs. SEMSTracker is comprehensive and intuitive web-based software that is designed to streamline the processes of managing and tracking information relating to special education as required by law. Based on current information from this data management system, African American males are reported as having the highest representation in special education programs in this school district. The current school year data indicates that there are 3,476 students with disabilities, 1,767 are African Americans. Disproportionality is not determined from this data management system; however the information provided through SemsTracker gives the total number of students served in special education by race and gender which is the focus of this research study.

Statement of the Problem

Disproportionality of African American males in special education has persisted well over three decades, and continues to cause concern in the education community. Although researchers have debated numerous causal factors related to disproportionality, the role of

teacher expectations and the effect on disproportionality is not fully known. When a student's representation in special education programs or specific education categories exceeds their proportional enrollment in a school's general population, and labeling students as disabled when they truly are not, continue to be the norm, disproportionality will persist. Addressing this problem is necessary with the intentions of finding solutions for decreasing the number of African American males being referred to special education. By decreasing the referrals of African American males to special education programs and setting high expectations for achievement, the problem of disproportionality may, in part, ultimately be resolved. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the role teacher expectations have on the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools.

Significance of the Study

Based on data from the National Association of Education (2007), many school districts across the country report higher representation of African American males in special education than their proportion in the general education population. Local school boards and other education agencies continue to express concern about the overrepresentation of African American males and other minorities in special education programs. Piland (2002) studied causal factors related to disproportionality of African American males in special education; however this researcher did not determine which of these factors were responsible for overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs. Little is known about the role of teacher expectations on disproportionality, therefore, it is this researcher's intent to address this void in the literature thereby advancing knowledge and understanding of

how teachers influence and shape the disproportionality of African American males in special education, and the role that teacher expectation has on disproportionality in special education. By obtaining data and examining the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality, school district administrators may be able to identify strategies to address or eliminate the problem. For example, if this study reveals that teacher expectations have a significant impact on disproportionality, school districts may include professional staff development training to increase emphasis on the impact that teacher expectations have on African American males. It is intended that a study of this nature would add to the empirically based research and may assist school districts with understanding the cause of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. Findings may further increase the awareness of this long standing problem and may encourage school administrators to implement strategies and solutions to address the problem of African American males and their disproportionate placement in special education.

As an educator, this researcher is committed to examining factors that continue to contribute to the disparity of placement for African American males in special education programs. Information obtained from this study may be used to re-emphasize to teachers and school administrators that those who encourage high achievement and consider each individual student's strengths and weaknesses may greatly influence and impact student achievement. If teachers and school administrators believe that all students deserve to be educated in the least restrictive environment and take into account the different modalities of learning, the initial referrals to special education will be decreased and hopefully eliminate the problem of disproportionality of African American males and other minorities in special education.

Research Questions

Through this study, this researcher addressed the following overarching research question: How does teachers influence shape the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools? The following sub questions were considered:

1. What facets of teacher's expectations shape disproportionality of African American males in special education programs?
2. How does teacher background training and experience influence their decision to refer African American males to special education? (For example: experiences and training through a traditionally certified teacher preparation program or alternative teacher preparation program, years of teaching experience and expectations for African American males).

Research Procedures and Design

This study employed a qualitative design to understand the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality of African American males in special education. Glense (2006) explained that qualitative research methods are designed with the intention of understanding a social phenomena, creating predictions concerning the phenomena, and providing causal explanation. This research method is used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved. This qualitative approach provided a deeper understanding of the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality of African American males in special education.

A phenomenological research design was used to examine the responses from beginning teachers, veteran teachers, general education and special education teachers. Creswell (2003)

defined phenomenological research as a methodology whereby the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. This qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how teacher expectations may impact disproportionality. The researcher chose the qualitative research design to gain some understanding from the perspective of each participant, their beliefs, ideas and perceptions of the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality of African American males. Creswell (2003) stated, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem” (p. 185).

Participants. For the purpose of this study, beginning general education and beginning special education teachers, and veteran general education and veteran special education teachers from one school district located in Georgia were selected to participate in this study. Teachers entered the profession through a traditional teacher education program and alternative certification programs were selected to participate. The participants were identified as currently employed Richmond County School teachers from four middle schools based on the highest number of African American males referred to special education. Based on data from the selected school district, there are more African American students in special education at the middle school level compared to white students at the same level. Therefore, a variety in middle school selections gave the researcher a myriad of responses from various teacher experiences, background, and school location. Schools selected varied in location, size and socioeconomic status. Participants were asked to provide their own views and ideas about the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality of African American males in special education.

The researcher used information from school data base to identify study participants that were needed to conduct the study. A total of four teachers were selected from each of four middle schools in the district selected for the study. One veteran general education teacher, one beginning general education teacher, and one veteran special education teacher and one beginning special education teacher from each of the four schools were selected. Two schools from inner city (schools located within the city limits) and two suburban schools (schools located outside of the city limits) were selected to participate. The total participants will consist of 16 teachers.

Deciding on a sample size for qualitative studies can be more difficult than quantitative because there are no definite rules to be followed (Mugo, 2007). This author argued that sample size depends on what one wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with available time and resources. Mungo (2007) purported that with fixed resources, one can choose to study one specific phenomenon in depth with a smaller sample size. The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry are obtained through information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size.

Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the Superintendent of Richmond County School district to conduct the research study and to interview teachers selected to participate. Prior to beginning the data collection, the researcher obtained permission from Georgia Southern University's Institutional Review Board. The researcher conducted the interviews at the selected school sites at a time arranged and agreed upon by each participant. Participants were ensured of

confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms for all identifying information. A letter of participation was mailed to each selected participant. The letter included an introduction of the researcher, a brief overview of the problem and information regarding their participation in the study. The intended participants were asked to mail the letter of participation to the researcher indicating their acceptance to participate in the study within ten days of receipt of the letter. A stamped envelope was provided to each prospective participant to return the letter of participation to the researcher. For responses not received after ten days, the researcher followed up via email reminding participants of the request for their participation and their intent. As an employee of the selected school district, this researcher has access to the email addresses of the selected participants. Upon receiving the signed consent to participate, the researcher mailed each participant an informed consent letter that explained the conditions of their voluntary participation, and an explanation of the process to be used for conducting the interviews. The researcher informed the participants that the interviews would be audiotaped, transcribed and kept in a secure location by the researcher. The data to be collected from this study was from interviews as outlined below. The researcher developed an inventory of questions from the current research that will be used to elicit views, perceptions, ideas and beliefs of the participants. Prior to the data collection process, the researcher obtained each participant's signed consent to participate in the interview process.

Interviews. Qualitative interviews may be used either as the primary strategy for data collection, or in conjunction with observation, document analysis, or other techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual variations. The researcher conducted 60 minute semi-structured individual interview

sessions at the selected school sites using open-ended questions and clarifying questions as they arose. These open ended questions were intended to gather information from the participants regarding their ideas, beliefs, feelings and experiences about teacher expectations and disproportionality of African American males in special education. In the event a study participant was unable to participate in a face to face interview, the option of a phone interview was made available to allow participation in the research study. Participants were encouraged to share any additional information they would like to share. A tape recorder and note taking was utilized; the former allowed the researcher to capture all participants' responses.

Data Analysis

Glense (2006) defined data analysis as a process involving organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that one can make sense of what you have learned. Through working with the data collected, the researcher can create explanation, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link findings to other stories. To do this, you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data you have collected (Glense, 2006). Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what one will tell others”. Lewins (2005) defined qualitative data analysis as information gathered in nonnumeric form. The researcher utilized coding strategies to identify themes that emerged from the raw data. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) described this process as “open coding”. During open coding, this researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed were grouped. Open coding allowed the researcher to identify themes without any restrictions or purpose other

than to discover nuggets of meaning. These data collected in this study were categorized into major themes which includes "setting and context codes, perspectives held by subjects, subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, strategy codes, relationship and social structure, and pre-assigned coding systems" (Creswell, 1994). The researcher attempted to get the respondents to respond to the interview questions in a way that will answer the research questions. The main secret of open coding is a mental openness that allows for the discovery of the unexpected along with a curiosity that does not allow for final closure, even after texts have been read and codes identified from it. Coding is thus a very questioning activity. Open coding is particularly about labeling and categorizing of phenomena. This must be a careful activity as names come with many connotations (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Limitations of the Study

The following represent the limitations of this study:

1. Results cannot be generalized, but may provide helpful information to school districts where overrepresentation of African American males exists.
2. The study cannot control teacher's truthfulness during the interview process; therefore the results of the study may provide authenticity of results.
3. Schools selected will vary in location, size and socioeconomic status.

Delimitations of the Study

1. This study is limited to general education and special education teachers; therefore cannot be generalized to school administrators.

2. The study is limited to African American male students and cannot be generalized to other student minorities or gender.
3. Although research has explored numerous causal factors related to disproportionality of African American males, teacher expectation is the only variable that will be explored in this study.
4. This study was conducted in middle schools in Richmond County school district.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to assist the reader in comprehension of the text. These definitions are primarily from the Georgia Department of Education regulations since this study occurs in a Georgia school district.

Alternatively certified teacher - An individual who has the basic qualifications to teach early childhood, middle-grades, secondary or P-12 education but have not completed a teacher preparation program, and who holds a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited institute, but who did not complete teacher education preparation requirements as part of their degree programs (Georgia Department of Education).

Autism: Autism is a developmental disability, generally evident before age three that adversely affects the student's educational performance and significantly affects developmental rates and sequences, verbal and nonverbal communication, and social interaction and participation

Beginning Teacher: A teacher with less than three years of classroom teaching experience.

Compulsory education: Education in which children are required by law to receive and governments are required by law to provide. The compulsion is an aspect of public education. In some places homeschooling may be a legal alternative to attending school.

Disproportionality: When a student's representation in special education or specific education categories exceeds their proportional enrollment in a school's general population.

Economically disadvantaged student: One who is a member of a household that meets the income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced price meals.

Emotional Behavioral Disorders: An Emotional Behavioral Disordered student is a student who, after receiving regular educational assistance, counseling, alternative placement and/or other procedures available to all students, still exhibits one or more of the following characteristics of sufficient duration, frequency, and intensity that it interferes significantly with educational performances to the degree that provision of special education services is necessary:

- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and/or teachers.
- An inability to learn which cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, sensory, neuropsychological or general health factors.
- Consistent or chronic inappropriate type of behavior or feelings under normal conditions.
- Displayed pervasive mood of unhappiness and depression

Essence of human experience – Getting to the depth of the participant's perception.

Gifted student - A student who demonstrates a high degree of intellectual and/or creative ability (ies), exhibits an exceptionally high degree of motivation, and/or excels in specific academic fields, and who needs special instruction and/or special ancillary services to achieve levels commensurate with his or her abilities

Hearing Impairments: Students with hearing impairments exhibit a hearing loss that interferes with the acquisition or maintenance of auditory skills necessary for the development of speech,

language, and academic achievement. A hearing loss is determined by an audiological evaluation and an ontological assessment.

Inclusion setting: Students receive special education services in the general education setting with both general and special education teacher in the classroom.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The federal law that was enacted to ensure that all students with disabilities will have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living; to ensure the rights of students with disabilities and their parents are protected: to assist states, localities, educational service agencies, and federal agencies to provide for the education of students with disabilities, and to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate students with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2002, p. 170).

Intellectual Disabilities: A student with intellectual disabilities exhibits significantly sub-average intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affect educational performance and is manifested during the developmental period. Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning is defined as approximately 70 I.Q. or below as measured by a qualified psychological examiner on individually administered, standardized measures of intelligence.

Learning Disabilities: Students with Learning Disabilities demonstrate a disorder in one of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language (spoken or written), which may manifest itself in an impaired ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell or do

mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia.

Least Restrictive Environment: Students with disabilities, including those in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated, to the maximum extent that is appropriate, with students who are not disabled, and that special classes, special schooling or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if the nature and severity of the disability are such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Georgia Department of Education, 2002, p. 168).

Mild Intellectual Disabilities: When a student has significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning that exist concurrent with deficits in adaptive behaviors.

Orthopedic Impairment: Orthopedic Impairment refers to students whose severe orthopedic impairments affect their educational performance. This term may include: impairment caused by congenital anomalies, e.g., deformity or absence of some member; impairment caused by disease, e.g. poliomyelitis or bone tuberculosis Impairment from other causes e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures.

Other Health Impairments: Other Health Impaired students have chronic or acute health problems resulting in limited strength, vitality or alertness that adversely affect their educational performance.

Overrepresentation: Overrepresentation occurs when a particular population or demographic group in special education or gifted programs exceeds their presence in the overall student population.

Poverty: Poverty is an economic idea related to power and the use of it; it is ingrained in our total culture and involves all our institutions (Chamberlin, 2001).

Public Law 94-142: It is the purpose of this Act to assure that all handicapped children have available to them, within the time periods specified in section 612(2) (B). A free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, to assure that the rights of handicapped children and their parents or guardians are protected, to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all handicapped children and to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts.

Pull out setting: Students who are identified for special education are removed from the general education setting and provided instructions in a separate classroom from a special education teacher.

Race: Race is the self, as well as societal, imposed definition of a person or group (Ivey, 1989).

Response to Intervention: In education, Response to Intervention (commonly abbreviated RTI or RtI) is a method of academic intervention used in the United States designed to provide early, effective assistance to children who are having difficulty learning. Response to intervention was also designed to function as a data-based process of diagnosing learning disabilities. This method can be used at the group and individual level.

Risk ratio: When applied to a disability type, risk ratio answer specific questions such as: What is a specific racial or ethnic group's risk of receiving special education and related services for a particular disability as compared to the risk for all students.

Self-Fulfilling prophecy: A prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to become true.

Socio-economic status: A family's socioeconomic status is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community. Families with low socioeconomic status often lack the financial status.

Speech-Language Impairments: Students with speech-language impairments exhibit oral communication skills that differ so far in manner or content from that of their peers that the speech calls attention to itself, disrupts communication, or affects emotional, social, intellectual or educational growth.

Special Education: Is a specifically designed instruction, provided at no cost to parents, that meets the unique needs of a student with a disability. Special education includes instruction in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals, institutions and other settings.

Student achievement: Strives to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or economic status receive an excellent education.

Teacher expectations: Presumptions teachers make about the academic achievement of students.

Traditionally certified teacher: An individual who has completed a teacher education program from an accredited institute and has received at least a Bachelor's Degree in the field of education.

Veteran Teacher: A teacher with three or more years of classroom teaching experience.

Visual impairment: Students with visual impairments exhibit a loss of vision that interferes with academic achievement. Visual impairment is determined by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.

Weighted Risk Ratio: The ratio of the district levels risk for the racial/ethnic group (numerator) and the weighted risk ratio (denominator).

"Whole" child: Refers to the social, emotional, intellectual and physical child.

Summary

This chapter has focused on background information to a long standing problem that has plagued school districts across the nation for over three decades. Although several studies have attempted to address this problem, there continues to be students of color, particularly African American males and other minorities who are disproportionately represented in special education programs. National data obtained from National Education Association (2002) reported that African American males are nearly three times more likely than white males to be labeled mentally retarded and account for 14.8 percent of the general population of 6 to 21 year old students (Losen & Orfield, 2002). The Georgia Department of Education reported that African American males identified as mild intellectual disabled constitutes 84 percent of African American males in special education programs. Data from the selected school district indicated that African American males have been disproportionately represented in programs for mild intellectual disabilities for the past three years based on the weighted risk ratio that is assigned by the Georgia Department of Education.

The chapter further discussed causal factors that may contribute to the long standing problem. Some of the causes include, race and gender, poverty, teacher referral, behavior, and teacher expectations. Disproportionality exists when there is an overrepresentation of a particular minority group compared to their representation in the total school population. Although numerous causal factors have been researched, none have provided an exact cause of this problem.

Finally, the chapter outlined procedures that will be followed in order to complete this study. The research question that is to be answered is: How do teachers influence/shape the

disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools? The research design chosen for this study was a phenomenological research design using a thematic method of data analysis in order to understand the role of teacher expectations on disproportionality of African American males in special education. A qualitative design was chosen to gain an understanding from the perspective of each participant, their beliefs, ideas, and perceptions of the role teacher expectations have on disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. A purposeful sampling method was utilized to gather information for the study. Using this method of sampling, the researcher's intent was to select participants and schools that will best assist the researcher with understanding the problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education. The population chosen for this study consisted of teachers from two middle schools located within the inner city and two schools in suburban areas of Richmond County school district were selected to participate in the study. Veteran teachers, (teachers with three or more years of teaching experience) who are general education and special education teachers, and beginning teachers (teachers with less than three years of experience) who are general education and special education teachers were selected to participate in the study. The variation in the selection of participants allowed the researcher to gather a myriad of perspectives. The population was chosen because it was convenient and accessible. The sample participants were chosen because they possess the knowledge, understanding, and experience that the researcher needs in order to conduct a meaningful study.

The instrumentation for this study was semi-structured interviews. A tape recorder and note taking were used during the interview process. At the selected school sites, or via

telephone, approximately 60 minutes semi-structured interviews were conducted using open ended questions and clarifying questions as they arose. Participants were encouraged to share any additional information that would be relevant to the study. The notes and the tape recording of the interviews were analyzed and coded to identify emerging themes.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
INTRODUCTION

Mandell et al. (2007) argued that the problem of disproportionality of African American males is further amplified because a significant number of African American males are placed in restrictive, self-contained classrooms rather than in classrooms for students with mild disabilities. These authors claimed that as a result of these placements, African American males are being denied appropriate services and opportunity to interact and acquire social and educational values. The problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education has been briefly discussed in Chapter 1 and will be further addressed in Chapter 2. This chapter begins with a discussion of critical race theory, the impact of race and special education, a brief discussion of the history of special education of African American males in the United States, and disproportionate representation of minorities in special education.

The chapter will further define and discuss categories of disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This will include how children are identified for evaluation and an explanation of how disproportionality is defined and monitored. Finally, literature regarding teacher expectations and the impact on African American males will be addressed.

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was reauthorized and brought with it a focus on the education of children with disabilities from ethnically diverse backgrounds, as well as strengthen the mandate to place children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (deValenzuela et.al, 2006). According to deValenzuela, disproportionate representation and placement has been a prominent special education topic in research due to

reported disproportionality of African American students in the categories of mild mental retardation. To date, research on disproportionate representation in special education has focused on students from diverse backgrounds during the elementary and secondary school years. Chin and Hughes (1987) claimed that children from ethnically diverse backgrounds are disproportionately represented in special education programs in the public school system. These authors argued that special education programs with the greatest disproportionate representation figures occur in mental retardation. The issue of disproportionate representation of ethnically diversified students has been so widespread in the American educational system that the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) that “separate was not equal”.

Obiakor and Ford (2002) professed that the real problem of the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education is that miscategorization leads to misplacement, and misplacement leads to misinstruction. Further, these authors contended that misinstruction results in failure and ultimately a cycle of low expectations and frustration that begets more failure; a vicious cycle that contributes, ultimately to in-school and post-school failure for a disproportionate number of students of color. The main premise of their study is that the current situation with African American male’s disproportionate placement in special education programs across the nation is a problem. Losen and Orfield (2002) and Zhang and Katsiyannis (2002) stated that the reason this is a problem is that inappropriately labeled students may receive an inappropriate education in that they may receive services that do not meet their needs. Mandell et. al. (2007) reported that the overrepresentation of African American males in special education has global and far-reaching consequences that make the dilemma a

national tragedy. According to Kunjufu (2005), the public school population is comprised of 8 percent African American males. However, African American males constitute almost 30 percent of students placed in special education.

Hosp and Reschly (2004) examined variables that could contribute to the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. They found that academic achievement had a strong relationship to disproportionate representation. This supported the work of Oswald, et al (1999) who found correlations between environmental or economic variables and racial or demographic variables in the over representation of African Americans in the disability categories of Mental Retardation and Emotional Disordered. Hosp and Reschly (2004) extended these variables to apply to the category of Learning Disabled as well, and added the variable of academic achievement. Fierros and Conroy (2002) examined restrictiveness, in terms of educational setting in special education as it intersects with race. Their research revealed that special education students from racial minority groups are more likely than whites to be placed in restrictive educational settings. This finding was most pronounced for African Americans and Hispanics. Trends from their data indicated two things: 1) “once identified, African American males and other minority students from every major racial group are more likely than white students with disabilities to be removed from the general education classroom for all or part of their school day”; 2) “black students are most often over identified in the disability categories that have the highest correlation with isolation from the general education setting, mental retardation and emotional disturbance”. Based on these facts, Fierros and Conroy (2002) contended that African American males continue to be

overrepresented in special education programs and identified as having a disability more often than their white counterparts.

Critical Race Theory

Ladson-Billings (2001) and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) professed that no set of doctrine or methodologies define critical race theory, but contended that there are three beliefs associated with it. The first is that racism is difficult to eradicate, because it is so commonplace in our society. These authors indicated that critical race theory asserts that racism is “normal, not aberrant in American society” and because it is so enmeshed in our society it appears both normal and natural. Critical race theory contains an activist dimension and research carried out in this vein should seek to transform unfair practices and improve conditions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The second belief of critical race theory is that many in our society do not want to see an end to racism. The status quo is good for many. Haberman (2003) pointed out that many constituencies benefit from failing school systems and structures. Some examples of those benefits according to Haberman include: central office employees whose goal is to protect the present distribution of financial rewards, power, status and unearned privileges; students in other districts who are unfairly compared to their less fortunate peers (because the playing fields are unequal); and consultants and researchers who gain financial advantages but often do not solve problems.

The third belief is that of social construction, that race and races are a result of social thought and relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The author suggested that we create our

beliefs about concepts through our thinking and interactions and we determine what race means by our thoughts, actions, and experiences.

Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas (1999) purported that the connection between critical race theory (CRT) and education serves the dual purpose of providing a race-based interdisciplinary theoretical framework of analysis to the study of education laws, policies and administrative procedures that have a deleterious impact on racial minorities in K-12 and higher education settings. Parker (1999) contended that critical race theory can also benefit from the qualitative and quantitative research process by adding methodological enhancement of the data collected as evidence and the questions asked related to demonstrating racial discrimination. This builds on other critical perspectives on race and education because they too provide more detailed analysis and theoretical perspectives on issues related to representation, identity, discrimination and positive racial struggle for social justice by minority students and communities. The importance of linking CRT to education in general and ethnographic research and detailed quantitative studies of educational inequality is its potential for activism and critical race praxis. The questions for education and its utility for CRT calls for us to raise key policy issues such as, how do race, gender, and social class interact and impact the educational conditions and outcomes of students of color?; why, how and for what purposes do schools and teachers reinforce racial, class and gender inequality in relation to students of color?; and, how do students of color and their parents/community respond to race, class, and gender inequality (Parker, 1999)?

Race and Special Education

Ivey (1989) contended that the clearest part of the discussion is that there exists a larger number of racial minorities represented for specific categories. The author argued that after this

point the discussions become ambiguous. The author further contended that race, is the self, as well as societally imposed definition of a person. It encompasses skin color, language, facial and bodily features, group affiliation and connotes culturally specific phenomena. Heath (1995) stated that historically it has been implied that minority students are different. Heath (1995) argued that white culture represents the norm against which comparisons are made in our society and what minority people have been traditionally defined for what they lack rather than for what they are. Heath declared that this deficit view of minority people can often determine white people's cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions to minority individuals.

Blanchett (2006) asserted that special education has become a "new legalized form of structural segregation and racism". Parrish (2002) examined the extent to which minority students are overrepresented among students receiving special education, while some also may be underserved. This author further examined the extent to which these patterns of over and under representation relate to the allocation of special education resources. Parrish found that financial incentive for high minority districts appeared to be related to higher rates of overrepresentation.

National, state and district data obtained from U.S. Department of Education (2007) show African Americans and other minority students with disabilities are often educated in more segregated or restrictive environments than their white peers. Fierros and Conroy (2002) found that fifty five percent of white students with disabilities spent 80 percent of their school day in general education classrooms and only one-third of black students with disabilities spent 80 percent of their day in general education classrooms. In 2002, the National Research Council published a report on the number of students in special education by race. According to the

report, when a problem was readily observable, and diagnosable by medical professionals (such as deafness, blindness, or orthopedic impairment, there was not marked disproportionality in the numbers of students referred for special education services. The article further reported that disparities were consistently found in the special education categories that carried the greatest stigma, including mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and to lesser degree, learning disabilities.

History of Special Education

In the past century, special education has come a long way. In 1921, the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act, and The Social Security Act of 1935, Title V Act made headway for children with special needs. Nearly 30 years later, the Mental Retardation Planning Amendments of 1963 (Public Law 88-156) revised the Title V Act to address the needs of young people with chronic and disabling conditions and those at risk for such conditions. In 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act or Public Law 94-142, amended to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted on the assumption that “all children between the ages 5-17 have the fundamental right to education. It was the intent of this law that all school-age children, including those with the most severe limitations, receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Burgess (2001) stated that the point of special education services, accommodations and modifications is equity. This author purported that every child, regardless of disability, has the right to access the same opportunity than any other student has. This is true whether one is discussing gender, students of color, students with disabilities, students from economically deprived backgrounds, students who speak another language, or any other student who is enrolled in public education system (Burgess,

2001). Special education programs are specifically designed for students identified as having various disabilities that affect learning, and physical, sensory, or emotional development (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). There are 13 special education programs listed in the federal special education law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). The Individuals with Disabilities Act guarantees students with disabilities the right to be educated with their peers in the general education classroom to the maximum extent appropriate in the least restrictive environment. Least restrictive environment is determined by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team, which includes parents, and educators whose primary role is to first consider providing services in the general education class with the full range of supports, accommodations, modifications, differentiated instruction, and personal supports before considering providing those services in special education settings (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). The Georgia Department of Education (2005) explained that students with disabilities should be educated with children who are non-disabled; and that special education classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disabilities is such that education in regular classes with these supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Information obtained from GDOE (2005) further reported that currently one half of the students with disabilities in Georgia received 80 percent or more of their instruction in general education classes. Students with disabilities may be primarily taught in general education classrooms, self-contained special education classes, or specialized schools that are completely separate from regular public schools. According to the United States Department of

Education (2007) approximately 96 percent of students with disabilities are educated in general education environments, such as public school buildings and general education classes.

Education of African American Males in the United States

Today's education is often viewed as failing in its goal of educating students, especially those students characterized as minorities, including African American, Hispanic, and Appalachian students (Quiroz, 1999). Among the minority groups mentioned, African American males are affected most adversely. Research has shown that when African American male students are compared to other students by gender and race they consistently rank lowest in academic achievement (Ogbu, 2003), have the worst attendance record (Voelkle, 1999), are suspended and expelled the most often (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Staples, 1982), are most likely to drop out of school, and most often fail to graduate from high school, or to earn a General Education Diploma (GED), (Pinckney, 2000; Roderick, 2003). Research has also shown that this record of poor performance by African American male students during their elementary and secondary school years limits their involvement in education at the college level (Cross & Slater, 2000) and correlates strongly with their disproportionately large numbers in the country's jails and penitentiaries (Males & Macallair, 2000; Yeakey, 2002). Adult African American males lead the nation in being undereducated, unemployed (Boyer, 1988; Hornor, 2002; Pinkney, 2000), and incarcerated (Drakeford & Garfinkel, 2000). African American males are also characterized as having more health problems (Kirk, 1986) and dying at a younger age (Boyer, 1988; Hornor, 2002; Kirk, 1986; Pinkney, 2000), regardless of race and gender, than any other group in America. Pinkney (2000) professed that the challenges faced by African American males in American society are well known. What may not be widely recognized is the role

America's schools play in perpetuating these problems. From a historical perspective, the unsuccessful journey of the African American male student from public school through to his unfulfilled place in society did not end with *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision that ended de jure school segregation in 1954. Even though a series of civil rights bills in the 1950s and 1960s eliminated the Black codes, repealed Jim Crow laws, and guaranteed voting rights for Blacks, the plight of African American students in our schools did not improve (Ascher, 1995). There is no single overriding factor to explain this lack of success, but most scholars and researchers point out that beginning in the colonial era and continuing through most of our nation's history, the experiences of black males in white society have been so negative and psychologically damaging (Pinkney, 2000; Staples, 1982) that they have given birth to and nurtured a deep-seated and tenacious belief in their own, and the entire black communities, inferiority. At the beginning of this history, black male slaves were looked upon by white society as the most undesirable and least trust worthy of people, and they were treated accordingly. Black male slaves were closely associated with and compared to animals, and were said to have a deceptive and violent nature and to be uncontrollable and in need of the whip (Kunjufu, 1986). Given this formative experience in slavery, the fact that African American males have continued to be disadvantaged from birth to death throughout our nation's short history hardly seems to need explanation (Kunjufu, 1986). A broader problem that plagues African American males is not totally the responsibility of the public schools, but are a responsibility of society as a whole (Delpit, 1995). This author argued that the public schools do play a major role in addressing the problems of African American male students. The educational experiences and the support services afforded African American students could play

an important role in helping them reverse their dismal school performance and subsequent journey through life, to a life with the potential for success. Research has shown that when public schools provide a more relevant education with services that address their psychological and emotional needs, African American males begin to experience greater school success and their feeling of inferiority begins to fade (Franklin, 1999). This author argues that relevant education includes designing school programs and curriculums to address the specific behavioral and emotional deficits that are determined through psychological evaluations.

Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education

The President's Commission on Excellence in special education reported that a particularly disturbing finding is that children of minority status are over-represented in some categories of special education. This is especially apparent for African American males in high-incidence categories such as mental retardation and emotional disturbance (U.S. Department of Education, 2008) The recent National Research Council report on minority representation in special education found that African American children are twice as likely as whites and American Indians/Alaskan natives to be identified for the mental retardation category. In the emotional disturbance category, African American students are about half more likely than White students to be classified in this category. The Commission did not find significant evidence for over-representation of minorities in the learning disabilities category. The magnitude of the over-representation problem varied across state and local education agencies within all high-incidence categories. However, no consistent evidence for over-representation of minorities in low-incidence categories was found. The Commission found that several factors were responsible for this over-representation, including the reliance on IQ tests that have known cultural bias. This

may result in more minority children being identified in the mental retardation category as opposed to the Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) category. Minority children are much more likely to be placed in the emotional disturbance category because of behavioral characteristics associated with the cultural context in which a child is raised. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (2001) suggested that a bias in referrals for special education services exists with males, particularly African American males than females and other minorities for behavioral concerns. One of the reasons cited for this discrepancy is that African American males are likely to be labeled as pathological more quickly than their male counterparts or other minorities because of their outbursts or other boisterous behavior in the classroom. In addition, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (2001) purported that any behavioral difficulties African American males may experience become more evident to teachers because there are often externalizing behavioral problems, making any issues these students are facing more noticeable than they might be for girls or other students' who often present with internalizing rather than externalizing problems. Research suggests that teachers pay more attention to African American males and respond more quickly when these students display any misbehavior than when other students display any misbehavior, even when the behavior is identical (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). A major factor is the role of teacher referral. In some studies, teachers refer more than 80 percent of children who are placed in a high-incidence category. To the extent that teachers are not prepared to manage behavior or instruct those with learning characteristics that make them "at risk" in general education, minority children will be more likely to be referred (The President's Commission on Excellence, 2008). Below is a brief overview of the categories of disabilities and eligibility criteria for each.

Categories of Disabilities under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The federal definitions outlined in Individuals with disabilities act (IDEA) guide how states define disability and who is eligible for a free appropriate public education under special education law. In order to fully meet the definition (and eligibility for special education and related services) as a "child with a disability," a child's educational performance must be adversely affected due to the disability (Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)). Areas of disabilities under IDEA include: Autism, Emotional Behavior Disorders, Specific Learning Disabilities, Mild Intellectual Disabilities, Moderate Intellectual Disabilities, Severe Intellectual Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Deaf, Other Health Impaired, Visual Impairment, Deaf/Blind, Speech/Language Impairment, and Gifted. The definitions of these specific terms from the IDEA regulations are listed and defined in Definitions of terms of this research study.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will define and discuss three areas of special education where African American males are mostly disproportionate in placement in states across the country. Jordan (2005) reported that The 23rd Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) indicated that African American students continue to be overrepresented across all thirteen legally sanctioned disability categories with significant disproportionality occurring within the categories of mental retardation and emotional disorders. These disability areas are reported by Jordan (2005) as two of the most prevalent disability categories that also include learning disabilities and together account for the largest number of African American children served in special education. Mild Intellectual disabilities, emotional behavior disorders and specific learning disabilities are

explained below as defined by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Georgia Department of Education, 2002).

Mild Intellectual Disability. Intellectual disabilities refers to significantly sub average general intellectual functioning which exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affect educational performance and is manifested during the developmental period. Significantly sub average general intellectual functioning is defined as deficits in adaptive behavior are defined as significant limitations in an individual's effectiveness in meeting the standards of maturation, learning, personal independence or social responsibility, and especially school performance that is expected of the individual's age-level and cultural group, as determined by clinical judgment. Individuals with intellectual disabilities typically have strengths that coexist with weaknesses in adaptive behavior. During the pre-school years the primary criteria for adaptive behavior evaluations are sensory motor skills; communication skills; self-help skills; and socialization. In addition to the previous criteria, during the school age years evaluation criteria include the use of basic academic skills in practical situations, the use of reasoning and judgment in coping effectively in a variety of environments, the acquisition of social skills and establishing and maintaining satisfactory personal relationships. In late adolescence and adulthood, additional criteria related to independent functioning and vocational activities are used.

Eligibility and Placement. A student may be classified as having an intellectual disability when a comprehensive evaluation indicates deficits in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior shall be considered equally in any determination that a student is eligible for services in the area of intellectual disability. A

comprehensive educational evaluation shall be administered to determine present levels of academic functioning. A written report shall be prepared for each student to provide an adequate description of the data collected during evaluation and to explain why the student is eligible for services in a program for students with intellectual disabilities. In situations where eligibility discrepancies exist between test score results from intellectual functioning, adaptive behavior and academic achievement, the eligibility report must contain a statement of specific factors considered which resulted in the decision of the eligibility team. A student may be classified as having an intellectual disability at one of three levels (mild, moderate or profound (Georgia Department of Education, 2002).

Emotional Behavior Disorders. An emotional and behavioral disorder is an emotional disability characterized by the following:

- (1) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and/or teachers. For preschool-age children, this would include other care providers.
- (2) An inability to learn which cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors.
- (3) A consistent or chronic inappropriate type of behavior or feelings under normal conditions.
- (4) A displayed pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (5) A displayed tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains or unreasonable fears associated with personal or school problems.

A child with EBD is a child who exhibits one or more of the above emotionally based characteristics of sufficient duration, frequency and intensity that interferes significantly with

educational performance to the degree that provision of special educational service is necessary. EBD is an emotional disorder characterized by excesses, deficits or disturbances of behavior. The child's difficulty is emotionally based and cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, cultural, sensory general health factors, or other additional exclusionary factors.

Eligibility and Placement. A child may be considered for placement in a program for children with an emotional behavior disorder based upon an eligibility report that shall include the following:

- (1) Documentation of comprehensive prior extension of services available in the regular program to include counseling, modifications of the regular program or alternative placement available to all children, and data based progress monitoring of the results of interventions;
- (2) Psychological and educational evaluations
- (3) Report of behavioral observations over a significant period of time;
- (4) Appropriate social history to include information regarding the history of the child's current problem(s), the professional services and interventions that have been considered or provided from outside the school; and adequate documentation and written analysis of the duration, frequency and intensity of one or more of the characteristics of emotional and behavioral disorders.

A child must not be determined to be a child with an Emotional and Behavioral Disorder if the primary factor for that determination is: lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including the essential components of reading instruction; lack of appropriate instruction in math; lack of appropriate instruction in writing; limited English proficiency; visual, hearing or

motor disability; intellectual disabilities; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or atypical education history (multiple school attendance, lack of attendance, etc.). The term does not include children with social maladjustment unless it is determined that they are also children with Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD). A child whose values and/or behavior are in conflict with the school, home or community or who has been adjudicated through the courts or other involvement with correctional agencies is neither automatically eligible for nor excluded from EBD placement. Classroom behavior problems and social problems, e.g., delinquency and drug abuse, or a diagnosis of conduct disorder; do not automatically fulfill the requirements for eligibility for placement (Georgia Department of Education, 2002).

Specific Learning Disabilities. Specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders, environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

The child with a specific learning disability has one or more serious academic deficiencies and does not achieve adequately according to age to meet grade level standards. These achievement deficiencies must be directly related to a pervasive processing deficit and to the child's response to scientific, research-based interventions. The nature of the deficit(s) is

such that classroom performance is not correctable without specialized techniques that are fundamentally different from those available in the general education classroom, basic remedial/tutorial approaches, or other compensatory programs. This is clearly documented by the child's response to instruction as demonstrated by a review of the progress monitoring available in general education and Student Support Team (SST) intervention plans as supported by work samples and classroom observations. The child's need for academic support alone is not sufficient for eligibility and does not override the other established requirements for determining eligibility.

Exclusionary Factors. A child must not be determined to be a child with a specific learning disability if the determinant factor for that determination is: (a) lack of appropriate instruction in reading, to include the essential components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension); (b) lack of appropriate instruction in math; (c) lack of appropriate instruction in writing; (d) limited English proficiency; (e) visual, hearing or motor disability; (f) intellectual disabilities; (g) emotional disturbances; (h) cultural factors; (i) environmental or economic disadvantage; or (j) atypical educational history (such as irregular school attendance or attendance at multiple schools)

Required Data Collection. In order to determine the existence of Specific Learning Disability, the group must summarize the multiple sources of evidence to conclude that the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, state-approved grade level standards and intellectual development. Ultimately, specific learning disability is determined through professional judgment using multiple supporting evidences that must include: (a) Data is collected and considered prior to conducting a formal

evaluation for special education. (b) At least two current (within twelve months) assessments such as the results of the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) which is designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards, norm-referenced achievement tests or other benchmark tests indicating performance that does not meet expectations for grade level standards.

Eligibility Determination. The child who is eligible for services under the category of specific learning disability must exhibit the following characteristics: a primary deficit in basic psychological processes and secondary underachievement in one or more of the eight areas along with documentation of the lack of response to instructional intervention as supported by ongoing progress monitoring. Deficits in basic psychological processes typically include problems paying attention, discrimination/perception, organization, short-term memory, long-term memory, conceptualization/reasoning, executive functioning, processing speed, and phonological deficits. Once a deficit in basic psychological processes is documented, there shall be evidence that the processing deficit has impaired the child's mastery of the academic tasks required in the regular curriculum. Though there may exist a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, evidence must be included documenting that the processing deficits are relevant to the child's academic underachievement as determined by appropriate assessments that are provided to the child in his/her native language. Though a child may be performing below age or state approved grade level standards, the results of progress monitoring must indicate that the child is not making the expected progress toward established benchmarks. This is indicated by comparing the child's rate of progress toward attainment of grade level standards. Underachievement exists when the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weakness in performance, achievement, or both, relative

to age, state-approved grade level standards and intellectual development and when a child does not achieve adequately toward attainment of grade level standards in one or more of the following areas: (a) Oral expression- use of spoken language to communicate ideas; (b) Listening comprehension-ability to understand spoken language at a level commensurate with the child's age and ability levels; (c) Written expression - ability to communicate ideas effectively in writing with appropriate language; (d) Basic reading skills-ability to use sound/symbol associations to learn phonics in order to comprehend the text; (e) Reading comprehension-ability to understand the meaning of written language based in child's native language; (f) Reading Fluency Skills- the ability to read and process a text with appropriate rate and accuracy; (g) Mathematics calculation-ability to process numerical symbols to derive results, including, but not limited to, spatial awareness of symbol placement and choice of sequence algorithms for operations required; and regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a child of his or her age; (b) A highly qualified certified special education teacher; and (c) A minimum of one other professional qualified to conduct individual evaluations (Georgia Department of Education, 2002).

Identifying Children for Evaluation

Before a child's eligibility under IDEA can be determined, however, a full and individual evaluation of the child must be conducted. There are at least two ways in which a child may be identified to receive an evaluation under IDEA:

(1) Parents may request that their child be evaluated. Parents are often the first to notice that their child's learning, behavior, or development may be a cause for concern. If they're worried about their child's progress in school and think he or she might need extra help from special

education services, they may call or write to their child's teacher, the school's principal, or the Director of Special Education in the school district.

(2) The school system may ask to evaluate the child. Based on a teacher's recommendation, observations, or results from tests given to all children in a particular grade, a school may recommend that a child receive further screening or assessment to determine if he or she has a disability and needs special education and related services. The school system must ask parents for permission to evaluate the child, and parents must give their informed written permission before the evaluation may be conducted. Federal law mandates that all children referred for special education services are deemed eligible by a multidisciplinary team comprised of knowledgeable professionals and parents (IDEA, 2004). The multidisciplinary team is mandated to ensure that all areas of a suspected disability are assessed using valid and reliable assessment measures (Macy & Hoyt-Gonzales, 2007). A referral to special education can be made from either a parent who suspects a disability in their child or a professional, including teachers, who have a concern that a child is not developing appropriately. Once a child is referred to the public school system for special education, the child's parent or legal guardian must sign consent for evaluation, which results in a cost-free assessment to be conducted in all areas of suspected eligibility. This evaluation must occur within 60 days of the parent/legal guardian's consent for evaluation. Once the evaluation determines that the child qualifies with one of the 13 special education eligibility categories, the child's parents/ legal guardians and the school system form an Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.) team. This team reviews the assessment results, writes annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks, and determines the appropriate

educational setting for the child to receive special education services based on the goals and benchmarks written (Georgia Department of Education, 2007)

How Disproportionality is Defined and Monitored

In general, disproportionate representation, or disproportionality, refers to the over- or under-representation of a given population group, often defined by racial and ethnic backgrounds, but also defined by socioeconomic status, national origin, English proficiency, gender, and sexual orientation, in a specific population category. A child's race and ethnicity significantly influence the child's probability of being misidentified, misclassified, and inappropriately placed in special education programs. There has been extensive research that showed the relationship between race and ethnicity and other variables for students' placement in special education classes. Variables such as language, poverty, assessment practices, systemic issues, and professional development opportunities for teachers have been cited as factors that play a role in disproportionality. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), (2001) recommended use of risk index and risk ratio in calculating disproportionality for a school district. The risk ratio, when applied to a disability category, answers the question, "What is a specific racial/ethnic group's risk of receiving special education and related services for a particular disability as compared to the risk for all other students? (OSEP, 2001). The risk ratio compares the relative size of two risks by dividing the risk for a specific racial/ethnic group by the risk for a comparison group. For example, one could calculate a ratio that compares the risk of a black student being labeled as having a certain disability to the risk of a white student. When the ratio is greater than 1 for black students in a category of disability, the risk that a black student will be labeled as having the identified disability is greater than the risk of a white

student being so labeled. Parrish (2002) also made use of the risk ratio when calculating disproportionality. The risk ratio for a particular racial/ethnic group does not depend on that racial/ethnic group's percentage of the school district's enrollment. The size of a racial/ethnic group's risk ratio also does not depend on differences in overall special education identification rates because the risks for the racial/ethnic group and for the comparison group both come from the same district (OSEP, 2001). Caution must be used in applying risk ratios to district-level data. Risk ratios cannot be compared across districts because the size of the risk ratio is affected by the district-level racial/ethnic demographics of the comparison group. Also, risk ratios are difficult to interpret when based on small numbers of students in either the racial/ethnic group or the comparison group. Additionally, risk ratios cannot be calculated when there are no students in the comparison group receiving special education and related services (OSEP, 2001). Table 1 reflects the risk ratio that is determined by the state of Georgia regarding disproportionate representation in special education. A weighted risk ratio of 1.20 – 1.99 indicates at risk for disproportionality. A weighted risk ratio of 2.00 – 3.00 indicates disproportionate representation, while 4.00 and higher would indicate significantly disproportionate representation. Table 1 shows the weighted risk ratio and the weighted risk categories assigned by Georgia Department of Education.

Table 1. Weighted Risk Ratio

Weighted Risk Ratio	Risk Ratio Categories
1.20 – 1.99	At Risk
2.00 - 3.99	Disproportionate
4.00 and higher	Significantly Disproportionate

Based on the data over a three year period (2006-2008) from Georgia Department of Education, African American students across the state of Georgia were disproportionate in the area of intellectual disabilities and at-risk in the area of emotional behavior disorders. Intellectual disabilities refer to significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning with deficits in adaptive behavior functioning that adversely affects educational performance. An emotional behavior disorder is characterized by the presence of internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, depression and somitization that significantly interferes with learning. A child identified as having a behavior disorder exhibits one or more of the characteristics over a significant duration, frequency and intensity that interferes significantly with educational performance. (IDEA, 2007). Table 2 depicts the representation equitability and risk of disproportionality by specific disability type in the state of Georgia.

Table 2. Risk of Disproportionality by Disability Type (Georgia)

Georgia			
	2006	2007	2008
All Disabilities			
Alaskan/American Indian	0.92	0.92	0.93

Table 2. Risk of Disproportionality by Disability Type (Georgia) (continued)

Asian/Pacific Islander	0.41	0.42	0
Black	1.08	1.03	1.04
Hispanic	0.71	0.75	0.78
Multi-Racial	0.95	0.95	0.94
White	1.09	1.13	1.12
Emotional Behavior Disorders			
Alaskan/American Indian	1.19	1.17	1.03
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.15	0.15	0.16
Black	0.52	1.44	1.46
Hispanic	0.26	0.25	0.27
Multi-Racial	1.02	0.99	1.07
White	0.92	0.99	0.98
Intellectual Disabilities			
Alaskan/American Indian	0.59	0.54	0.52
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.33	0.36	0.4
Black	2.55	2.35	2.35
Hispanic	0.56	0.6	0.6
Multi-Racial	0.59	0.59	0.55
White	0.49	0.53	0.56
Specific Learning Disabilities			
Alaskan/American Indian	0.93	0.91	0.94
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.33	0.34	0.36
Black	0.93	0.94	0.96
Hispanic	1.05	1.13	1.19
Multi-Racial	0.86	0.85	0.84
White	1.13	1.12	1.07

Table 3 shows the representation equity/risk of disproportionality by disability types. The data shows the risk ratio for Georgia and Richmond County School district from 2006-2007 school years. No disproportionality was determined for all disabilities in Georgia and Richmond County from 2006-2007; however for Intellectual Disabilities, African Americans were found to be disproportionate during the 2006-2007 school years.

Table 3. Representation Equity Risk of Disproportionality By Disability Type Georgia and Richmond County

	Georgia		Richmond County	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
All Disabilities				
Alaskan/American Indian	0.92	0.92	*	*
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.41	0.42	0.31	*
Black	1.08	1.03	1.01	1.06
Hispanic	0.71	0.75	0.64	0.61
Multi-Racial	0.95	0.95	0.93	0.85
White	1.09	1.13	1.2	1.18
Autism				
Alaskan/American Indian	0.73	0.48	*	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.98	1.08	*	0
Black	0.83	0.79	0.78	0.85
Hispanic	0.48	0.49	*	*
Multi-Racial	1.14	1.14	*	*
White	1.38	1.45	1.12	1.05
Emotional and Behavioral Disorders				
Alaskan/American Indian	1.19	1.17	*	*
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.15	0.15	*	*
Black	1.52	1.44	1.31	1.43
Hispanic	0.26	0.25	*	*
Multi-Racial	1.02	0.99	1.02	*
White	0.92	0.99	0.98	0.97
Intellectual Disabilities				
Alaskan/American Indian	0.59	0.54	*	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.33	0.36	*	0

Table 3. Representation Equity Risk of Disproportionality By Disability Type Georgia and Richmond County (continued)

Black	2.55	2.35	1.97	2.13
Hispanic	0.56	0.6	*	*
Multi-Racial	0.59	0.59	0.61	*
White	0.49	0.53	0.7	0.64
Other Health Impairments				
Alaskan/American Indian	1.01	1.16	*	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.21	0.23	*	*
Black	0.73	0.73	0.62	0.67
Hispanic	0.35	0.38	0.87	*
Multi-Racial	1.07	1.08	1.3	*
White	1.78	1.8	1.64	1.64
Specific Learning Disabilities				
Alaskan/American Indian	0.93	0.91	*	*
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.33	0.34	*	*
Black	0.93	0.94	0.84	0.87
Hispanic	1.05	1.13	0.58	*
Multi-Racial	0.86	0.85	0.9	*
White	1.13	1.12	1.47	1.41
Speech/Language Impairments				
Alaskan/American Indian	0.98	0.92	*	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.75	0.73	*	*
Black	0.75	0.72	0.63	0.74
Hispanic	0.87	0.91	0.72	*
Multi-Racial	1.26	1.14	0.97	*
White	1.36	1.42	1.77	1.68

The data from the Georgia Department of Education for disproportionality is calculated by race and not specifically by gender. Therefore, the risk ratio for African American males is not available at the state level. However, information from the selected school district's Information Management System (SEMSTracker) shows the number of African American males and their representation in special education programs for specific disabilities. Of the 3,482

students in special education in Richmond County, 1,765 are African American males and 541 are White males. For the purpose of this research project, the focus on the disproportionality of African American males will be based on the data that has been disaggregated by gender in the selected school district.

Teacher Expectations and African American Males

The effects of teacher expectancy of student success have been studied over the past forty years, most significantly in the late 1960's and 1970's. Results of these studies have generally shown that teachers expect certain behaviors and abilities from their students. Thus, teachers believe differently, whether intentionally or not, toward students based upon their various expectations of them. Pope (2002) defined teacher expectations as a teachers' belief about students' futures, more specifically, the confident anticipation of behavioral or academic futures of students. High teacher expectation generally correlated with high student achievement, whereas low expectations correlates with lower achievement levels, as the student will begin to react to the teacher's treatment of them (Pope, 2002).

Current laws require general and special education educators to identify, assess, place, and instruct their students in a manner that does not label them or destroy their self-concepts. Obiakor (1999) claimed that African American learners confront multidimensional problems in schools and communities in identifying and accessing student needs. One such problem is the issue of teacher expectations. Obiakor (1999) further claimed that ironically, these special education processes are loaded with presumptions and expectations that in themselves lead to discriminatory generalizations and illusory conclusions. Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck and Connell (1998) agreed with Obikor (1999) and claimed that one of the strongest predictors of children's

performance in school is individual differences in their perceived control. For many African American learners, how teachers understand and interpret their world views and how they are expected to perform affects their motivational and self-concept interpretations. When expectations of these students are inappropriately lowered or raised, how they interpret their self understanding, self love, and self empowerment may be affected (Obikor, 1999). According to Baird (2008), there is a substantial gap between the performance of white, middle class students as compared to that of minority and low-income students. The education of minority students is impacted by the level of education teachers receive in language and multicultural issues. Teachers come with many culturally driven values that shape the instruction in the classroom. If those values are not congruent with the learning styles and needs of minority students, then there is a greater likelihood that minority students may not be able to achieve at the same level of the majority group. Lumsden (1997) argued that many factors contribute to differences in student effort, expectations, and persistence. Lumsden further indicated there is a substantial gap between the performance of white, middle class students as compared to that of minority and low-income students. Additionally, minority children are more likely to live in poverty. Family beliefs, attitudes, and values towards learning have an impact on student achievement. Lumsden (1997) concluded that teacher expectations and experience in working with diverse students have a tangible effect academic success.

Teachers' expectations of children play a significant role in determining how well and how much students learn (Bamburg, 1994). This author concluded that teachers have bias towards students based on income, behavior, race, gender, language, and parent education level. In many schools, poor and minority children are often given a "dumbed down" curriculum, rather

than being exposed to more challenging course content. Low-income and minority students tend to be overrepresented in special-education, vocational-education, and general-education programs and underrepresented in college-prep tracks. Pringle (2007) conducted a study on the perceptions of teacher expectations by African American students and teachers in selected high schools. Pringle claimed that African American high school students are performing behind their white classmates regardless of whether they are in majority or minority populations at school. The author argued that teacher expectations along with school related factors can impact the academic achievement of African American students. Although poor and minority students can excel when expectations for them are high and content is challenging, most schools don't teach all students at the same high level. Baird (2002) contended that we have constructed an educational system so full of inequities that it actually exacerbates the challenges of race and poverty, rather than ameliorates them. Baird indicated that, we take students who have less to begin with and give them less in school, too.

Rist (1970) claimed that extensive literature on the phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophesy exists in the field of education. One classic article is, *Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-fulfilling Prophesy of Ghetto Education*, written by R. C. Rist in 1970. In this article, Rist described a process in which student success or failure depends on teacher expectations, with teacher expectations based not on students' academic ability but rather on their social class background. In a later book, Rist (1973) gave this phenomenon more extensive treatment in an account of classroom interactions at an all-Black elementary school in St. Louis. Beginning in kindergarten, teachers separated 'slow learners' from 'fast learners' based not on intelligence, ability, or preparedness, but largely on social class background. Rist demonstrated

how these groupings lead teachers to treat these different groups of students differently. He stated that within the classrooms, one of the seemingly inescapable consequences of the segregation systems were that the children themselves quickly picked up what it meant to be on one side of the barrier or the other. Each group of students began to emulate the teacher's treatment of the other. The high group followed the teacher in their ridicule, belittlement, physical abuse, and social ostracism of the lower groups. The lower-class students displayed patterns of deference and passivity towards those of the high group (p. 245). The point Rist made about differential treatment based on social class in the 1970's can be made today in relation to race, ethnicity, and gender. Unless our school systems make deliberate and systematic attempts to resist the process of separating students on the basis of race and gender, we risk collaboration in perpetuating inequities which, as educators, we know means offering inferior educational opportunities to African American male students who are just as capable as other students of achieving success. Davis (2003) cited evidence to show that, beginning in fourth grade, African American males experience "a sharp decline in their test scores" (p. 526). Davis goes on to state that, "these declines correspond to the ability grouping of African American males in which they only have access to lower level courses" (p. 526). The point is that race, ethnicity, and gender have replaced social class as what Rist (1973) called "The single most influential variable to which the teachers responded" (p.242). The formation of ability groupings in classrooms shape individuals' beliefs and attitudes of themselves, as well as their behavior. Although numerous causal factors have been explored regarding the disproportionality of African American males and their overrepresentation in special education, and the misidentification or identification as mildly disabled, this researcher purports that teacher

expectations strongly impact a student's academic achievement and success in the school setting. In addition, research has documented the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement; none have documented the effects teacher expectations have on disproportionality in special education, particularly for African American males.

Summary

Evidence of disproportionality of African American males in special education over the last three decades is a continuing issue. Federal government and judicial decisions have come into effect through Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in order to ensure that children with disabilities, rather than ethnic or cultural differences are appropriately identified and placed in special education programs. Despite long standing public concern, debate, and number of analyses of African Americans represented in special education, the actual proportions and causes of disproportionality are not yet understood. The essential challenge for appropriate placement with African American students has not been met.

History has repeated itself over the last thirty years and it is time that overrepresentation and misplacement of African American students stop. African American students are being persistently diagnosed as disabled and placed in special education programs. All students who may be experiencing academic difficulties are legally entitled to free and appropriate education under IDEA. However, these children, especially African American males are often relegated to services in non-inclusionary classroom settings that reduce the time they spend with non-disabled peers. While there is certainly a need to provide low achieving students with academic support to help them learn and develop, support should be of the very best quality possible to meet students' needs and to help them grow and develop as other non-disabled students.

This chapter has presented information and a review of literature on the disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. The literature review was centered on studies that have been conducted in an attempt to unravel the disproportionality dilemma that has plagued the education community for over three decades. Race, history and the education of African American males was also addressed in this chapter. The chapter further discussed definitions and categories of special education eligibilities, and eligibility requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Finally, the chapter discussed teacher expectations of African American males. This researcher found that there were limited numbers of research findings about how teacher expectations impact disproportionality of African American males. Because of this finding, more emphasizes is needed for further research to gain an understanding of what facet of teacher expectations shape or create the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Education, (NEA, 2007) reported that out of concern for their students and a determination to get them extra help so they do not fall behind academically, some teachers exercise the only option they think is available to them: referring students to special education programs. While these children will likely benefit from receiving special education services, it may not be the most appropriate option for some of them. Just by initiating the special education referral process prematurely, teachers sometimes unwittingly add to disproportionality in special education. NEA views disproportionality as an important issue to address in any local or state efforts aimed at closing the gaps in student achievement.

Disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs has been a national concern for nearly four decades. Since the U.S. Office of Civil Rights first started to sample school districts in 1968, African American students have been overrepresented in special education programs, particularly under the categories of mental retardation and emotional disturbance (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004). Several studies have attempted to address this long standing problem; however research is limited regarding the role teacher expectation has on this problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs across the country. This study was intended to gain an understanding of how teacher expectations influence disproportionality of African American males in Richmond County school district.

Research Questions

The major research question was: How do teacher expectations influence/shape the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools? The following sub questions guided the researcher in determining how teacher's expectations influence/shape disproportionality:

1. What facets of teacher's expectations shape/create disproportionality of American males in special education programs?
2. How do teacher background training, experience and expectations impact disproportionality of African American males in special education? (For example: experiences and training through a traditionally certified teacher preparation program or alternative teacher preparation program, years of teaching experience and expectation for African American males.

Research Design

The research design chosen for this research study was qualitative. Marshall and Rossman, (1999) indicated that qualitative methods focused on the meaning that people express about some aspect of their lives. Qualitative research is "pragmatic, interpretative, and grounded in the lived experiences of people". Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined qualitative research as descriptive, and suggested that this descriptive approach demands that the world be examined in a way where every piece of data has the potential for being a clue to a greater understanding and no piece of data is treated as trivia. Qualitative research is a type of research that is widely used to give people a voice while researching a particular subject matter (Creswell, 2005). The researcher

reported that in order to satisfy a growing curiosity of an apparent problem, to fully understand an issue within the educational field, or to simply fill a knowledge gap, one must take on the role of becoming a researcher, delve into the existing research concerning the issue of interest, and hopefully contribute findings or confirm findings of current research. Burke (2008) added that qualitative methodologies and quantitative methodologies were created for various audiences and the determination of which type to use depends on the desired quality of information or desired quantifiable relationships. Frankel and Devers (2002) explained that qualitative research methods are best suited when the research question pose puzzles that cannot be fully solved using usual research methodologies. The potential for being a clue to a greater understanding and no piece of data is treated as trivia. Participants were asked to express their feelings about the disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. The intent of the qualitative design was to obtain a better understanding of the role teacher expectation has on disproportionality of African American males in special education. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the data obtained provided a more in-depth understanding of each participant's understanding of disproportionality of African American males in special education. Filstead (1970) stated....

Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to get close to the data, thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself—rather than from the preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly qualified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed (p.6).

For the purpose of this study, there was no measurement of quantity or frequency for this qualitative researcher. Through semi structured interviews, the researcher had a direct and personal engagement in the personal experiences of each participant as they discussed the role teacher expectation has on disproportionality of African American males in special education. The researcher chose the qualitative research method because it is person-centered. Also, the researcher perceived qualitative as the best method to collect data for the research questions and sub questions to be studied more truthfully and soundly.

The interview questions posed in this research study did not lend themselves to mathematical models or statistical tables and graphs, as the quantitative researcher would have used (Denzin & Lincoln, (1998). The responses to the research questions were concerned with the perceptions or beliefs that teachers and school administrators have regarding the role teacher expectation have on disproportionate representation of African American males in special education.

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was semi-structured interview that incorporated direct, as well as indirect questions (Tuckman, 1988). This method of interviews allowed the researcher to ask a series of questions and then probe more deeply through the use of open-form questions (See Appendix E). By employing this method, the participants were able to express their views and their responses were valuable and useful.

The researcher developed interview questions that reflected the available research literature to answer the research questions. The interview questions included such questions as: What role do you think teacher expectations play in contributing to the problem of

disproportionality in special education? How does race relate to special education placement? Does teacher training and experience impact disproportionality of African American males in special education programs?

The researcher conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews at the selected school sites and two interviews via telephone. Semi-structured interviews were used as opposed to the structured or unstructured interviews to allow the researcher to gain an understanding of the long standing problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education from the perspective of educators working in a school district where the problem of overrepresentation of African American males is a problem. Gall (1996) stated that structured interviews does not allow for the attainment of the greater depth of information allowed for by the semi-structured interview. Table 4 shows a graphic representation of how each of the interview questions were developed. The first column in the table is the interview question, the second column shows the literature source, and the third column reports the question answered.

Table 4. Reviewing of Literature pertaining to item analysis of interview questions

Interview Questions	Literature Source	Research Question Answered
1. Tell me about your role in working with students in special education	Delpit (1995)	Research Question #1
2. How are students identified for special education in your school?	Georgia Department of Education (2007)	Research Question #1
3. Why do you think more African American males are identified for special education in this school district?	SemsTracker Management System (2009) Richmond County School System Data Base	Research Question #1
4. African American males are placed in special education programs at a much higher rate than their representation in the total school population. What role do you think teacher expectations play in contributing to this problem?	National Association of Education (NEA) 2007 Dunn, 1968 Piland, 2002 Essex, 2005 Whorton, 2002	Research Question #1

Table 4. Reviewing of Literature pertaining to item analysis of interview questions (continued)

<p>5. Based on the 2007 data obtained from Richmond County School district, disproportionality existed at the middle school level for African American males. What facet of teacher expectation do you think may have contributed to this problem?</p>	<p>Georgia Department of Education, (2007) Richmond County School System Department of Education Data Base</p>	<p>Research Question #1</p>
<p>6. How do you think teacher background, training and experience impact a teacher's decision to refer an African American male to special education?</p>	<p>Rist (1970)</p>	<p>Research Question #2</p>
<p>7. Explain how you think teacher training such as training through a traditional teacher education program or an alternative teacher preparation program may impact referrals to special education of African American males to special education programs?</p>	<p>Rist (1970)</p>	<p>Research Question #2</p>
<p>8. Have you worked with African American males in your classroom who were experiencing academic difficulties? If so, how did you work with these students to ensure that they were receiving the support that they needed? How did you help? What were your expectations?</p>	<p>Harry and Klinger, 2006</p>	<p>Research Question #1 and #2</p>
<p>9. How do you think teacher expectations impact student achievement?</p>	<p>Ryan, 2006</p>	<p>Research Question #1</p>

Table 4. Reviewing of Literature pertaining to item analysis of interview questions (continued)

<p>10. When teachers have low expectations for students based on their race and socio-economic status, how might this perpetuate the disproportionate number of African American males being identified with specific disabilities and placed in more restrictive environments?</p>	<p>Lumsden (1997)</p>	<p>Research Question #1 and #2</p>
<p>11. One researcher argued that when teachers expect students to do well, students tend to do well; when teachers expect students to fail, students tend to fail. How does this apply to African American males who are experiencing academic difficulties and ultimately referred to special education programs?</p>	<p>Rosenthan and Jacobson (1965) Barrett (2007) Harry and Klinger (2006) National Research Council (2002) Losen and Orfield (2002)</p>	<p>Research Question #1</p>
<p>12. What do you think may have contributed to African American male students in Richmond County School System being referred and overrepresented in special education programs for mild intellectual disabilities?</p>	<p>Georgia Department of Education (2007)</p>	<p>Research Question #2</p>
<p>13. How might a student's behavior influence a teacher's decision to seek assistance outside of their classroom or refer a student to special education?</p>	<p>Zimmerman (2005) Moran (2003) McMilian et al (1996)</p>	<p>Research Question #1</p>

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (1994) reported that data collection procedures for qualitative research involve determining boundaries, collecting data needed, and determining a protocol for recording the data. The process of data analysis is eclectic; there is no right way. Creswell (1994) explained

that because qualitative data are eclectic, the researcher is able to open possibilities and alternative explanations. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “alternative explanations always exist; the researcher must search for identity, describe them, and then demonstrate how the explanation offered is the most plausible of all”. The data that was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews was recorded using a tape recorder and the researcher’s hand written notes. These data was categorized into major themes and categories.

Population/Sample. The population for this study consisted of sixteen middle school teachers in Richmond County, Georgia. The Richmond County school system is located in Central Savannah River Area and consists mainly of an urban population. This school district has 32,368 students. Of the 32,368 students, 8,513 attend middle schools. The district consists of 59 schools, 9 of which are middle schools.

The population for this study was chosen for two reasons: The first was convenience. According to Miles and Huberman (1999), this method saves time, money, and effort but at the expense of information and credibility. To combat the possibility of a lack of information and credibility, the population for this study was chosen for criterion purposes. Because all of the participants in the population meet the same criterion of being a middle school teacher in the same district, quality assurance is more closely met. This researcher’s site selection and sample population was chosen due to accessibility. In addition, the researcher trusted that the gained information would be adequate and that efficiency would be ensured (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). There are nine middle schools in the Richmond County School district. The table below shows a brief description of the middle schools selected for the study, the type school and the total number of African American males referred to special education from 2003-2007 school

years. For the purpose of confidentiality, the names of the schools were masked and were represented with a letter. Schools marked with an asterisk have the highest number of African American males referred to special education among the nine middle schools in the district and will be used in this study. Sixteen teachers from two inner city and two suburban middle schools in the district were selected to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Table 5 shows a description of the participant's schools and the number of African American males referred to special education over a four year period.

Table 5: Description of Participant's Schools and Number of African American Males in Special Education Over a five Year Period

Middle Schools in Selected District	Type School	Total # African American Males referred to Special Education 2003-2007 School Years
School A	Inner City	10
School B*	Suburban	43
School C	Suburban	21
School D*	Inner City	29
School E*	Suburban	40
School F	Suburban	7
School G	Suburban	14
School H*	Inner City	19
School I	Inner City	10

Participants were purposefully selected because they were able to answer the research question and sub questions (Creswell, 1994). The participants were appropriate informants

because they possessed the knowledge, understanding, and experiences that the researcher needed in order to conduct the study. Participants included traditionally and alternatively certified general education and special education teachers who are employed in Richmond County School district. Hancock (2008) explained that qualitative approaches to data collection usually involve direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis or in a group setting. This author reported that data collection methods are time consuming and consequently data is collected from smaller numbers of people than would usually be the case in quantitative approaches such as the questionnaire survey. The benefits of using these approaches include richness of data and deeper insight into the phenomena under study (Hancock, 2008). Guide Star (2003) stated that qualitative research is much more subjective than quantitative research and uses very different methods of collecting information, mainly individual, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Small numbers of people are interviewed in-depth and/or a relatively small number of focus groups are conducted. Participants are asked to respond to general questions and the interviewer or group moderator probes and explores their responses to identify and define peoples' perceptions, opinions and feelings about the topic or idea being discussed and to determine the degree of agreement that exists in the group. Guide Star (2003) suggested that the quality of the findings from qualitative research is directly dependent upon the skill, experience and sensitivity of the interviewer or group moderator. Guide Star further indicated that unlike quantitative data, raw qualitative data cannot be analyzed statistically. The data from qualitative studies often derives from face-to-face interviews, focus groups or observation and so tends to be time consuming to collect. Samples are usually smaller than with quantitative studies and are often locally based. Data analysis is also time consuming and consequently expensive. The

researcher will be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 1994). By purposeful sampling key participants, special and general education teachers, the researcher obtained data from individuals who could contribute information about teacher expectations, student achievement and disproportionality, and communicate their perceptions regarding the role teacher expectation has on the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education. In determining sites realistic to the study, consideration for the data quality and the credibility of the study was given. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated that an important consideration for the data quality and the credibility of a study is the relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants. The researcher is currently employed as a special education program specialist in the school district selected for this study and has direct contact with the teachers and school administrators selected to participate. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that this increases the level of trust needed to aid in the data quality and the credibility of the study. To account for bias, the researcher bracketed personal experiences and perceptions in order to become more in touch with the participants beliefs, ideas and perceptions. According to Creswell (2003) the researcher brackets his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms and kept all tape recorded responses. The researcher signed the request to participate which outlined the participant's assurance of confidentiality.

Middle schools with the highest number of African American males referred to special education in the district over a four year period were selected for the study. The data was obtained from information that was readily available to the researcher via SEMSTracker management system used by the school district. The researcher is currently employed by the

selected school district in the Department of Special Education and has direct access to special education and system data. In order to preserve anonymity, the names of the teachers selected were pseudonyms. Participants were named, for the purpose of this study: traditionally certified general education teachers, alternatively certified general education teacher, traditionally certified special education teacher, and alternatively certified special education teacher. Teacher certification status was obtained from the district's personnel data base for which the researcher has access to. In the event this information was not available, the researcher asked the assistance of the school's administrator to identify the teachers who possess the characteristics needed to participate in the study. The researcher attempted to secure all sixteen purposefully selected participants; however if situations occurred that did not allow the originally selected participants to participate, the researcher followed through on a contingency plan that included selecting other suitable participants from the school's employee data base that met the criteria for participation. Table 6 shows a visual representation of the intended participants.

Table 6. Study Participants

Inner City School D	Inner City School H	Suburban School B	Suburban School E
1 Traditionally Certified General Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified General Education Teacher	1 Traditionally Certified General Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified General Education Teacher	1 Traditionally Certified General Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified General Education Teacher	1 Traditionally Certified General Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified General Education Teacher
1 Traditionally Certified Special Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified Special Education Teacher	1 Traditionally Certified Special Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified Special Education Teacher	1 Traditionally Certified Special Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified Special Education Teacher	1 Traditionally Certified Special Education Teacher 1 Alternatively Certified Special Education Teacher

Portraiture of Researched School

In order to maintain the confidentiality of the schools and participants interviewed by the researcher, the names of each school and teacher representatives were deleted from the data and responses were coded. School portraitures were written to assist the reader in connecting each school to the respective teachers. Schools were labeled as Inner city and Suburban school. Portraitures of the selected schools are based on the current school data from the Richmond County School districts public information data base.

Suburban Middle School B is located in Augusta, Georgia. This school is a public school with grade levels sixth grade through eighth grade. There are approximately 1,165 students at this school. There are 78 teachers. This makes the student to teacher ratio 14 students to 1 teacher. The national average is 15 which mean this school has less students in the classroom than most. There are 384 students in Grade 6, 361 in Grade 7, and 420 in grade 8. Eighth grade has the highest number of enrolled students. In this school there are 580 male students and 585 female students making the female students exceed the number of male students in this school. The student ethnic body is comprised of 76 white students, 6 Asian/pacific islanders, 30 Hispanic, 1050 African American students and 3 Native American students. The student economic level is above average. Only 909 students out of the 1,165 student population receive free or reduced lunch or 78.03 percent of the students. The teachers at Suburban Middle School B who participated in the study consisted of four individuals who are currently employed by Richmond County school district. Traditionally certified general teacher is a seventh and eighth grade teacher who teaches English/language arts, and has taught for 12 years. Traditionally certified special education teachers teaches seventh grade and works in an inclusion classroom

with special education students for 10 years. Alternatively certified general education teacher teaches seventh and eighth grade math and science and has worked for 10 years. Alternatively certified special education teacher has worked for 6 years with special education students in a science and math inclusion classroom.

Suburban Middle School E is located in Hephzibah, Georgia. This school is a public school with grade levels sixth grade through eighth grade. There are approximately 783 students at this school. There are 55 teachers. This makes the student to teacher ratio 14 students to 1 teacher. The national average is 15 which mean this school has fewer students in the classroom than most. There are 262 students in Grade 6, 260 in Grade 7, and 261 in Grade 8. Sixth Grade has the highest number of enrolled students. In this school there are 428 male students and 355 female students making the male students exceed the number of female students in this school. The student ethnic body is comprised of 25 white students, 21 Asian/pacific islanders, 24 Hispanic, 713 African American students and 0 Native American students. The student economic level is above average. Only 564 students out of the 783 student population receive free or reduced lunch or 72.04 percent of the students. The teachers at Suburban Middle School E who participated in the study consisted of four individuals who are currently employed by Richmond County school district. Traditionally certified general teacher is a 7th grade teacher who has taught for 12 years. Traditionally certified special education teachers teaches 7th grade, and has worked with special education students for 10 years. Alternatively certified general education teacher teaches math and science, and has worked for 6 years. Alternatively certified special education teacher has worked for 6 years with special education students in an inclusion setting.

Inner City Middle School D is located in Augusta, Georgia. This school is a public school with grade levels sixth grade through eighth grade. There are approximately 727 students at this school. There are 43 teachers. This makes the student to teacher ratio 16 students to 1 teacher. The national average is 15 which mean this school has more students in the classroom than most. There are 260 students in grade 6, 236 in grade and 7, 231 in grade 8. Sixth Grade has the highest number of enrolled students. In this school there are 397 male students and 330 female students making the male students exceed the number of female students in this school. The student ethnic body is comprised of 209 white students, 7 Asian/pacific islanders, 21 Hispanic, 490 African American students and 0 Native American students. The student economic level is above average. Only 438 students out of the 727 student population receive free or reduced lunch or 60.25 percent of the students. The teachers at Inner City School D who participated in the study consisted of four individuals who are currently employed by Richmond County school district. Traditionally certified general teacher is a 7th grade science teacher who has taught for 25 years. Traditionally certified special education teachers teach grades 6-8 and teach special education students for 20 years. Alternatively certified general education teacher teaches English, and has worked for 15years. Alternatively certified special education teacher has worked for 11 years with special education students in a pull out setting.

Inner City Middle School H is located in Augusta, Georgia. This school is a public school with grade levels sixth grade through eighth grade. There are approximately 632 students at this school. There are 40 teachers. This makes the student to teacher ratio 15 students to 1 teacher. The national average is 15 which mean this school has less students in the classroom than most. There are 221 students in grade 6, 206 in grade 7, 205 in grade 8. Sixth grade has the

highest number of enrolled students. In this school there are 332 male students and 300 female students making the male students exceed the number of female students in this school. The student ethnic body is comprised of 263 white students, 4 Asian/pacific islanders, 14 Hispanic, 351 African American students and 0 Native American students. The student economic level is above average. Only 354 students out of the 632 student population receive free or reduced lunch or 56.01% of the students. This school is a title 1 school. This means this school did not receive any federal assistance. The teachers at Inner City School H who participated in the study consisted of four individuals who are currently employed by Richmond County school district. Traditionally certified general teacher is a 7th and 8th grade teacher who has taught for 27 years and currently teaches Science. Traditionally certified special education teachers teach grades 6th through 8th and works with special education students in a pull out setting for 25 years. Alternatively certified general education teacher teaches English and has worked for 15 years. Alternatively certified special education teacher has worked for 9 years with special education students in a co teaching setting.

Analysis of Data

The focus of this study was to understand the role teacher expectations has on disproportionality of African American males in special education. The researcher chose descriptive methods since the primary objective was to summarize the data collected from interview responses. Once the data was obtained from the interviews, the researcher transcribed each interview and used the descriptive method to characterize and summarize the entire set of data to transform the data into a more manageable format. The descriptive method enables researchers to describe or present the picture of a phenomenon or phenomena about which little

is yet known. The descriptive method can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each transcript was read multiple times and careful attention was given to emerging themes. The responses were analyzed and grouped into categories to aid in understanding the role of teacher expectation on disproportionality of African American males in special education in the school district studied. As the categories were determined, the data was evaluated for its usefulness, allowing for some data to be put aside. Wolfe (1994) stated in the “very act of constructing data out of experience, the qualitative researcher singles out some things as worthy or not and relegates others to the background”. Marshall and Rossman (1999) reported that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. Creswell (2005) reported that the process of data analysis involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. Creswell further defined data analysis as using open-ended data which requires asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants.

Procedures

Prior to soliciting participants in the research, a request was made to the Superintendent of Richmond County school district to interview general and special education teachers to participate in the study. An application for approval to utilize human subjects in research, through Georgia Southern University’s International Review Board, was submitted. Upon approval, a letter to participate in the study was mailed to twenty-one purposefully selected

participants (See Appendix C). The participants were selected based on the following criteria: currently employed by the school district, working in a middle school setting, and having either traditional teacher certification or alternative teacher certification. The researcher used the school system's data base of employees to select the participants for the study. Although the study involved sixteen participants, five additional participants were selected in the event some of the participants did not respond. Each participant in the study was personally contacted in writing by the researcher requesting their participation. The letter of participation was mailed directly to the participant's school site. The participants were asked to respond within a ten day time period, and were provided an envelope to return the signed agreement to participate to the researcher. Once sixteen of the requests to participate were received, the point of saturation was reached. Francis, Johnson, and Robertson (2009) indicated that data saturation occurs when the researcher no longer needs information to proceed with the study. In interview studies, sample size is often justified when the point of saturation is reached. The researcher mailed each selected participant an informed consent letter explaining the purpose of the study and the specifics of their participation. (See Appendix D). A personal demographic sheet was included in the mail which requested the participant to provide name, grade and subject taught, age range, and certification type. (See Appendix G). Participants were contacted by phone to schedule an interview time convenient to both the researcher and the participant. The researcher informed each participant that the interview would take approximately one hour for completion. The researcher followed up by email to confirm the date and time of the interview.

At the beginning of each face to face interview and the interviews via telephone, the researcher thanked each participant for agreeing to participate and explained the role of the

researcher and the participants in the collection of data. The researcher gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and information regarding the problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. The Consent to Participate was reviewed and each participant was asked to sign prior to beginning the interviews. For the two participants who participated via telephone, the consent to participate was signed and mailed to the researcher prior to conducting the interviews. Every attempt was made to make the interviewee feel at ease since the main disadvantage named by Gall (1999) to the use of a tape recorder was that the presence of a recorder alters the process and may make some participants uncomfortable. The researcher assured each of the participants that their responses would remain confidential, and their names would be masked throughout the research study. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions throughout the interview as well as the opportunity to decline to answer any question. Using a tape recorder, all interview questions were asked and based on the responses given, the researcher made adjustments to the questions which added clarity. The tape recorder provided a complete verbal record which was not possible with simple note taking. This allowed for the information to be transcribed and studied much more thoroughly. A separate tape for each interview was used and each was labeled as suggested by Marshall & Rossman (1999) to “keep data intact, complete, organized, and accessible”. After the information was gathered, the researcher mailed each participant a written documentation of the transcribed interviews. The participants were asked to check for “factual error” rather than grammatical or editorial comments on the document. By checking for factual error, spontaneity and richness of information was preserved. The participants were asked to review the document and contact the researcher by phone within five days of receiving the

document if corrections were requested. None of the participants contacted the researcher with corrections or other concerns regarding the transcripts.

Summary

Historically, special education services have been viewed as an unequal and separate system instead of a system that promotes equality for all students (Zimmerman, 2005). Many school districts have demonstrated social inequity by over-representing minorities in special education. Disproportionate representation of African American students in special education has been an issue at the forefront of educational research and policy (Zimmerman, 2005). Theoretically, the intent of special education is to ensure that students with disabilities receive the same quality education as their non-disabled peers. However, if students are not receiving the same quality education, or are identified as disabled more often due to their race or ethnicity, there is a problem with the system (Ivey, 1986). The responses to the research questions were intended to assist the researcher with understanding the role teacher expectation has on disproportionate representation in special education. The research design that was used to answer the research questions were qualitative and descriptive. Semi-structured interviews were used with selected participants from a school district in Georgia. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length at the selected school sites or via telephone for participants who were unable to interview in person. The data obtained from the interviews were coded and analyzed by the researcher and used to understand the role teacher expectations has on disproportionality of African American males in special education in the selected school district. The researcher organized the transcripts by schools and color coded the transcripts. Using color coded tabs, the researcher labeled each school with a different color. Inner city school B was

labeled with an orange tab, inner city school D was labeled with a green tab, suburban middle school E was labeled with a yellow tab, and suburban middle school H was labeled with a blue tab. The transcripts were placed in a three-ring binder, which allowed the researcher to have an organized way of analyzing the data. Additional color tabs were used to identify participants by their level of certification. Purple tabs were used to identify alternative certified teachers and red tabs were used to identify teachers who entered the profession through a traditional certification route.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA COLLECTION

This chapter includes a brief introduction to the study including the purpose of the study and a summary of the research methodology. Also included are the research questions answered, a factual reporting of the data gathered, and an interpretation of this data.

Introduction

After receiving approval from the International Review Board (IRB), the researcher made appointments to visit and interview each of the participants in the study. There were sixteen participants in the study. Fourteen of the interviews were conducted at the participants' schools and two of the interviews were conducted via telephone at the participant's request. Each participant was asked to sign the consent prior to beginning the face to face interviews. Consents were faxed to the two participants who participated via phone. The two participants signed and faxed the consent back to the researcher before the interviews took place. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

After each interview was completed, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings. Each participant was given a name and school location. The researcher examined the transcribed interviews for the purpose of identifying common categories and themes. The researcher organized the data obtained into four categories based on the participant's responses to the research questions. These categories consisted of: Category 1: African American males representation in special education, Category 2: Disproportionality at the middle school level, Category 3: Teacher expectation and its role in influencing/shaping disproportionality, and

Category 4: Teacher background, training, experience, teacher certification and referral to special education. The purpose of this study was to understand the role teacher expectation has on disproportionality of African American males in special education. It was the intent of this study to address the issue of African American males being disproportionate in special education programs in Richmond County Middle schools.

Research Design

The research design used was qualitative and descriptive. The special education and general education teachers who participated in the study were interviewed by the researcher using semi-structured interviewing. Four schools in Richmond County school district were selected to be a part of this study. Schools were selected based on having the highest referrals of African American males to special education in the district. Each teacher's name was masked to maintain anonymity. Teachers were identified as Traditional General Education Teacher, Traditional Special Education Teacher, Alternative General Education Teacher and Alternative Special Education Teacher. The names given to the school selected were Inner City School D, Inner City School H, Suburban School E and Suburban School B.

The researcher conducted structured interviews that were tape recorded, transcribed to analyze the data, and later stored in a locked file cabinet. The research questions that guided the study were answered by the researcher based on the analysis of the information that was transcribed from the interviews. The research question was as follows: How do teachers influence/shape the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools? The following sub questions were considered:

1. What facets of teacher's expectations shape/create disproportionality of African American males in special education programs?
2. How does teacher background training and experience influence their decision to refer African American males to special education? (For example: experiences and training through a traditionally certified teacher preparation program or alternative teacher preparation program, years of teaching experience and expectations for African American males).

Table 7. Demographics of Schools in Richmond County, Georgia

School	Students	Economically Disadvantaged	White	African American	Other	Males	Females
Suburban School B	1165	78.03%	76	1050	39	580	585
Suburban School E	783	72.04%	25	713	45	428	355
Inner City School D	727	60.25%	209	490	28	397	330
Inner City School H	632	41%	263	351	18	332	330

Table 8. Demographics of Participants

Participants	School Type/Level	Type Certification	Years of Experience	Grade/Subject Taught
General Teacher(B)	Middle Suburban	Traditional	12	7-8 English/Language Arts
Special Teacher (B)	Middle Suburban	Traditional	10	7 Math
Alternative General Teacher (B)	Middle Suburban	Alternative	10	7-8 Math/Science
Alternative Special Teacher (B)	Middle Suburban	Alternative	6	6-8 Inclusion Math
Traditional General Teacher (E)	Middle Suburban	Traditional	25	6 Math
Traditional Special Teacher (E)	Middle Suburban	Traditional	6	6-8 Math
Alternative General Teacher (E)	Middle Suburban	Alternative	5	6 English/Language Arts
Alternative Special Teacher (E)	Middle Suburban	Alternative	6	7-8 Inclusion Math
Traditional General Teacher (D)	Inner City/Middle	Traditional	25	7-8 Science
Traditional Special Teacher (D)	Inner City/Middle	Traditional	20	6-8 Special Education
Alternative General Teacher (D)	Inner City/Middle	Alternative	15	8 English/Language Arts
Alternative Special Teacher (D)	Inner City/Middle	Alternative	11	6-8 Special Education
Traditional General Teacher (H)	Inner City/Middle	Traditional	27	7-8 Science
Traditional Special Teacher (H)	Inner City/Middle	Traditional	25	6-8 Special Education
Alternative General Teacher (H)	Inner City/Middle	Alternative	15	6-8 English Language Arts
Alternative Special Teacher (H)	Inner City/Middle	Alternative	9	6-8 Special Education

Interview Analysis

Special education students are served in special education through a continuum of services based on requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The researcher asked each participant to state their role in working with special education students. Each respondent was asked specifically: **Tell me about your role in working with students in special education?** Fifteen of the sixteen teachers (94 percent) indicated that they work with special education students in one of two ways: inclusion or pullout setting. In the inclusion setting, the special education teacher serves as the support staff providing accommodations and making modifications to the instructions for the students assigned to his/her case load. In the pull out setting, special education students are taken outside of the general education classroom to a small group setting with the special education teacher who provides one-on-on instructions in the academic deficit area or support in social emotional development. Alternative Special Education teacher at Suburban School E indicated:

“My role of working with students in special education includes providing additional instruction and one-on-one assistance when needed in math and language Arts for middle school students. I am a caseload manager and I ensure that students on my caseload are receiving the instructional and testing accommodations as indicated in student’s IEPs and ensure that student’s annual goals and objectives are addressed and attended to”. Traditional General Education teacher at Inner city school H stated: “I have one inclusion class and a special education teacher comes in with that class and we co-teach and then I have another class that has two special ed students in there, and an Aid is in there to act as a shadow and assist with one of the students”.

Researcher: In this setting, you are the teacher of record, is that correct? Traditional General Education teacher replied: “Yes”.

Researcher: Alright, what kind of assistance do you provide to those students in that classroom? Traditional General Education Teacher:

“Umm...in the special ed classroom we’re both going around, we assist when the kids have questions, we modify certain assignments that may need modifications of if they need support like using a calculator for certain science problems , like if were using formulas, we provide those kinds of materials. Two of the participants indicated that they work in a pull out setting with special education students providing individualized instructions in a small group setting.

Traditional special education teacher at Suburban school E indicated:

“I teach in a pull out setting students with disabilities that range from the mild intellectual disabilities, students with specific learning disabilities and students that have social emotional disorders...and I have worked primarily in a school that is predominately African American”.

Researcher: Tell me a little bit about the pullout setting.

“The pullout setting is for students that cannot function in the general ed setting for specific skills and concepts....They need a little more individualized education in order to grasp some of the concepts that are presented in the gen ed setting”. Alternative special education teacher at Suburban school E stated: “I work with special education students in a pull out class. The students I work with have intellectual disabilities with deficits in

adaptive behavior and academic achievement. Most of the students I teach are African American males and are performing two or three grades levels below their grade level. Many of them have been in special education since the elementary school where they were first identified as having a mild intellectual disability”. Traditional special education teacher at inner city school H indicated that her role in working with special education students is by working with the teachers assisting in the development of lesson plans and providing assistance with behavior modifications.

The researcher asked each participant: **Have you worked with African American males in your classroom who were experiencing academic difficulties, how did you work with this student to ensure that they were receiving the support they needed and what did you do to help?** All sixteen of the participants indicated that they provided tutoring, one-on-one instruction, small group instruction and asked for assistance outside of the classroom from special education teachers. Alternative General Teacher at Suburban School B stated:

“I offered tutoring in the morning and in the afternoon with my kids”.

Researcher: Okay, anything specific that you can recall doing for a particular African American male that may have been experiencing academic difficulty....any such program...any specific intervention that you may have put into play?

Alternative General Teacher Suburban School B stated:

“Well, with me, I decided I really just needed to sit down and talk with the kids and then tell em about my experiences as growing up and that they can do anything.”

Alternative General Teacher at Suburban School B stated:

“In terms of how I have helped them, I had to determine what the difficulties were academically. If there were difficulties outside of my content area, um I have sought assistance from teachers in those content areas”.

Participants at the Inner city schools indicated that they provided one-on-one support, differentiated instructions, positive reinforcements, accessing the needs of the student and providing male role models for these students. One participant stated:

“Being a special education teacher, all of the students including African American males were experiencing either academic or behavior problems. I always made a point to know my students, find out their strengths and weaknesses. I always made sure to focus on their strengths and not so much their weaknesses. I found that this made a tremendous difference in my relationship with them and ultimately their success”. Traditional

General Teacher at Suburban School E stated:

“I tried to talk to the student, talk to the parent, try to figure out where the problem was whether or not it’s a matter of you know just having some real, disability, you know just whether or not it truly is a learning disability, whether or not it is a lack of motivation, whether or not you’re needing more individualized instruction. There were so many things I could do as a math teacher to see if there was anything I was missing before I would refer them to SST. I would probably work with them the way I would want my boys worked with (Laugh).

To gain an understanding as to how students are identified for special education in this school district, participants were asked to explain based on their understanding and knowledge

how students are identified for special education. Each participant was asked: **How are students identified for special education in Richmond County?** Fourteen of the sixteen participants (94 percent) indicated that students are identified for special education through a process called Response to Intervention or RTI. In education, Response to Intervention (commonly abbreviated RTI or RtI) is a method of academic intervention used in the United States designed to provide early, effective assistance to children who are having difficulty learning. Response to intervention was also designed to function as a data-based process of diagnosing learning disabilities. This method can be used at the group and individual level.

Traditional Special Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“In Richmond County we have the RTI process and there are three tiers for the RTI, and once a student gets to the third tier, they are referred to special education and therefore then the IEP team decides if the student is eligible for any special education services”.

Traditional General Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“ If from what I understand and what I know to be true in the past, based on teacher recommendation after observing the student for several months or weeks and then looking at how they are interacting with their peers , how they’re learning etc...and whether or not they’re displaying any characteristics that may indicate that they need services”.

Thirteen of the participants at suburban and inner city schools agreed that students are identified for special education through Response to Intervention. Their responses include:

Alternative Special Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“Students in Richmond County should be identified for special education services through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process instead of the previous waiting to fail model. RTI is an approach to remediate students who are falling behind academically. Once identified, the student is given scientific based interventions for an extended period of time in an effort to remediate the student. If the student continues to display deficits after the designated time period, the student will receive an additional series of scientific based interventions”.

Alternative General Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“Students are identified for special education through a long process called RTI that is Response to Intervention. With this new process, it has been very difficult to get students into special education. Before this came along, teachers could just refer, refer, and refer students to special education with very little interventions tried. It was nothing for a teacher to just say that the child could not do something and refer them to special education and document the child’s response to the interventions. In other words, they have to provide proof”.

Traditional Special Teacher Inner City School D stated:

“They go through the process of being identified and once they are identified, well in the past students were referred for testing and then they are looked at for the eligibility. But lately now, the student or a student is referred they have to go through

the tiers, tiers of intervention and the teacher actually has to present documentation and show artifacts that, that demonstrate and indicate what the child is actually having a problem with”.

Traditional General Teacher Inner City School D stated:

“Umm you go through the RTI Process. You start with certain basic things to help em, and if you don’t see results and them getting back on track academically or behaviorally, then you move up to the next level of interventions, and by the time you reach level three of the interventions, usually by that time they are referred for further testing to the school psychologist”.

Alternative Special Teacher Inner City School D stated:

“Well, you know well okay, the way students get into special education now is through something new that our system has implemented the past two years. It is like the old SST well, Student Support Team, but now it is the same thing with a new name and a little bit more responsibility for the teachers where they have to prove what they have done for students before putting them through to special education”.

Researcher: Who identifies these students for special education?

Alternative Special Teacher Inner City School D stated:

“It starts with the classroom teacher. If they think that a child is having problems, then they will make the referral to the RTI team”.

Traditional Special Teacher and General Teacher at Inner City School H reported that the process of Response to Intervention was used to brainstorm intervention strategies to assist struggling learners. Both participants agreed that students are not automatically referred to

special education after going through the RTI process. Alternative General Teacher Inner City School D stated:

“Students are referred to the RTI team when a teacher determines that they are struggling or having difficulty in the general education setting. If this does not work for the student, then they are referred for special education. After the child has been evaluated by a psychologist, the team meets to review the results and look at all of the interventions to make a determination as to whether the student is eligible for special education services”.

Alternative Special Teacher Inner City School D:

“It’s a lot different this year because we don’t have that many kids who are referred for special ed because of the RTI. It’s, it’s just made a big difference. I think it involves a whole lot of work”.

In contrast to the Response to Intervention method of identifying students for special education, three of the participants indicated that students in Richmond County are identified for special education through testing. Traditional General Teacher Suburban School B stated:

“As far as my knowledge is that right now we go through and then if their tested, and determined whether or not they go to special ed. We as classroom teachers when we notice problems we start at the bottom tier with interventions and things of that nature and I guess it goes if interventions don’t work, we go to the next level, our Response to Intervention Team and then we go to SST. From my knowledge, I think they’re tested; maybe I’m wrong I don’t know ...This is what I thought. I think they’re tested and it is determined whether or not they are eligible for special ed”.

Traditional Special Teacher Suburban School B stated:

“As far as I know they are identified in elementary school usually before they get to the middle school. Usually most teachers will check out the students and see how they are performing in their classroom and then if they are not performing up to task, then they are tested, excuse me...they are referred to testing and then they are tested and to find out if they qualify or do they fit into a certain category”.

Alternative General Teacher Suburban School B stated:

“Generally through testing. Teachers look at their permanent record and if a student already has an IEP and of course you know that’s followed in terms of accommodation in what have you and to look at the initial date of the IEP and that sort of thing, but then if the student does not have an IEP, for the most part you know, look at how the students fair academically you look at writing samples, reading and that sort of thing”.

After completing the interviews and transcribing the data, the researcher determined four categories based on the literature review and common themes from the participant’s responses to the interview questions. Following is an analysis of the categories.

Category One – African American Males Representation in Special Education

To gain an understanding from the participants as to their perception of why more African American males are identified for special education in Richmond County school district, the researcher asked each participant: **Why do you think more African American males are identified for special education in Richmond County school district?** A review of the responses revealed these common themes: teacher perceptions, system demographics, cultural differences/background of teacher, student behavior, and lack of teacher experience and teacher expectation. Student’s behavior yielded the most responses as to why African American males

are identified for special education in this school district. System demographics were also common among the participant's responses.

Alternative special teacher at suburban school E stated:

“I think that more African American males are identified for special education services in this county is because the behaviors displayed by African American males when they don't understand a concept. The inability to grasp the concept appears to affect their self-esteem and as a result they act out in an attempt to cover the underlying problem which is a gap in their knowledge. This often results in students being over represented in areas of EBD and OHI”.

Traditional special teacher at school E stated:

“I think that maybe um when it comes to behavior disorders kids that come from different background maybe teachers don't understand um the difficulties and the challenges that they have at home and that is transferred into the classroom, they see it as a behavior disorder or emotional disorder when mostly likely that maybe they don't learn the social skills you know what's acceptable at home, might not be acceptable in other settings”.

Traditional special teacher at Suburban school B stated:

“They have behavior issues um I think for the most part they didn't have anyone to really help them with structure or someone to listen to them and or find out the things that they were willing to work for to behave”.

Traditional general teacher at suburban school B stated:

“I think behavior plays a part in it and a lot of times we don’t know how to deal with things we think something’s wrong with the child”.

Alternative general teacher at suburban school B stated:

“I would have to say that it is socio-economic status and behavior”.

Researcher: Okay, you wanna elaborate a little bit more on those two variables?

Alternative General Teacher Suburban School B:

“Yes, um for the most part, I see that the majority of the African American males who are a part of special education in my building um, they’re EBD um that’s, behavior related...and most of these young men do very well academically. Yet you know um, they’re placed in special education setting because of their behavior and I think a lot of times that overlooked when it comes to special education and a lot of that behavior stems from the fact that they come from low income families...and a lot of times they’re considered to be high risk and you know...if a teacher cannot deal with the behavior and understand the reason for the behavior , then there seems to be a fall out as a result of that and then you know, then there’s the testing, this student needs to be tested you know and it just goes on from there”.

System demographics were identified by many of the participants as the reason why more African American males are identified for special education in this school district. Five out of sixteen participants (31 percent) thought that system demographics were a causal factor in

African American males being identified for special education in this school district. One respondent stated:

“The only answer I can give for that is demographics. Another participant indicated:

“This school district is mostly African American, so that could possibly be the reason we have more African Americans in special education”.

Traditional general teacher at Inner city school H stated:

“Well, I think for one thing, you have to look at demographics of the district. The only answer I can give for that is demographics. We are in a predominately black county”.

Another theme that was common among the participant’s responses was cultural differences. Some of the participants agreed that because of the cultural differences of African American males, many of them were misunderstood. One participant, Traditional General Education Teacher at Suburban School E stated:

“I think that probably we have certain expectations of how students are suppose to be, how they’re supposed to act, how they’re suppose to behave and socially African American boys, we socialize them in our homes to be strong, to be active to be um very rambunctious, and um to be anything other than that in our culture. In our culture, then you’re thought to be weak. So when those boys are growing up, we encourage them to move around, we encourage them to play, we encourage them to be active you know we encourage them to be boys if you will and then once they enter the school system whereas were expecting them to sit for a certain amount of time, were expecting them to

be able um to control that movement. But I think you could easily stereotype them and say okay you know, you're black and you're bad".

Researcher: So are you saying that their cultural upbringing may have some impact on them being referred and ultimately placed in special education because of teachers not understanding their cultural up bringing or the African American child in general?

Traditional General Education Teacher at Suburban School E stated:

"I think it could do that I think that , I think that society in general has placed certain stereotypes, they've said that you know when you look at the news you have black boys. Black boys are always doing this, they're criminals, they're bad, this that and the other. I think some of the teachers are guilty of having preconceived notions as to you know okay he's doing things, he's doing that, he must be bad, because he's not like the norm"

Based on the 2007 data collected from Georgia Department of Education, Richmond County School district is disproportionate in the number of African American males who are placed in special education programs for students with mild intellectual disabilities. When asked the question: Why do you think African American males are identified for special education in Richmond County school district? Five of the participants indicated that behavior was a causal factor in African American males being identified for special education in this school district; however five other participants thought that system demographics contributed to this problem of disproportionality in this district. Other participants purported that factors such as misperception and teacher expectations were contributing factors that ultimately lead to African American males be identified for special education. The theme of student behavior and system

demographics had the most consistent responses among the participants as to why African American males are identified for special education in this school district.

Category Two – Disproportionality at the Middle School Level

Disproportionality of African American males exists at the middle school level in Richmond County school district for African American males in special education (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). Research sub question #1 was posed to each participant:

What facet of teacher expectation contributed to this problem at the middle school level for African American males? Some of the themes that emerged from the participant's responses included hormonal changes, growth and development, little or no teacher expectation, teaching strategies and lack of African American male teachers as reasons for disproportionality at the middle school level in Richmond County school system. One participant was adamant that a lack of African American male teachers contributed to this problem. This participant stated: "Well, I also feel what's contributed to it also, is that we do not have enough African American male teachers in middle schools to show kids and to be a role model for kids and show kids and to talk to kids and tell kids that they can do anything that they want". Another participant argued that little or no teacher expectation contributed to the disproportionate number of African American males in special education and stated "I think that little or no expectations of students by teachers has contributed to the disproportionately exhibited in the 2007 data obtained from the Richmond County School District".

Alternative Special Teacher Inner City School D stated:

"There's a lot of things going on at the middle school level, the kids are growing physically, intellectually, and hormonal changes....all of those kinds of things go into

play in middle school. And I think teachers let their expectation get in the way of just general maturity or things that middle schoolers usually go through and they begin to lower their expectations based on the behaviors sometimes that these kids exhibit”.

Traditional General Teacher Inner City School H agreed with Alternative Special Teacher at Inner C and stated:

“Well, first of all, middle school is hard. They’re dealing with hormones and also they are dealing with the problems that they already have, it compounds even more at that age and they are also at the point where they are trying to be accepted with their peers. They don’t know if they want to be an adult or a child, so they have a whole lot of things going on with them and right at the point they are confused. A lot of times they are forgetful, um they tend to be a little clumsy at times, but then their bodies are going through a whole lot of different changes. The voice is changing, sometimes the voice is light and it gets heavy and it’s kinda interesting to watch them as they go through this process. At that age, they’re trying to find themselves and find where they fit so sometimes they might tend to be a little odd”.

Seven of the sixteen participants (44 percent) agreed that changes and growth and development of the middle school aged male and teacher expectation of the African American male at the middle school level contributed to the disproportionate number of African American males being referred to special education in this school district. One participant indicated that “middle school kids come to middle school with all different types of problems, they’re changing from child to teenage, adulthood, whatever”. Another participant indicated that “middle school kids are unique. They are caught between childhood and teen hood. They are experiencing so

many changes. Attitudinal, moody, up, down, you name it, they go through it. I think all of these things that middle schoolers go through contribute to them being placed in special education at the middle school level”.

Category Three- Teacher Expectation and its role in influencing/shaping disproportionality

The purpose of this research study was to understand the role of teacher expectation on disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County school district. Research question 1 was posed to each participant: **African American males are placed in special education programs at a much higher rate than their representation in the total school population. What role do you think teacher expectation play in contributing to this problem?** Some of the responses included factors such as low expectation and lack of understanding that may have contributed to this problem. Twelve of the sixteen participants (75 percent) indicated that low teacher expectation played a role in African American males being disproportionate in special education. Some of the statements made by the participants include “you pretty much get what you expect”; “I can see how African American males were placed in special education more than their representation in the total school population because if a teacher doesn’t think a student has potential and can reach that student, then many times there are problems”. Two participants (13 percent) thought that a lack of understanding of the African American male contributed to disproportionality. Two participants (0.12 percent) believed that teachers just wanted to get the student out of the class and just don’t want to deal with them.

Alternative General Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“Without high expectation for students, especially African American males, their achievement and success is pretty much “shot”. If a teacher does not have high

expectation for African American males, this will most likely play a role in them being referred to special education which could ultimately lead to so many African American males being identified and placed in special education”.

Traditional General Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“I think as I said before, when you.....you know if I, if I’ve been told and I hear it all the time and I see it on the news and every time you know, there are so many black boys in prison you know um, if you look at so many of the studies or whatever you know they may say that by third of fourth grade you’re gonna have x number of black boys who was destined to go to prison or whatever or they’re the ones who are committing crimes or whatever so we automatically assume that ok if they can’t sit still, they’re getting a little bit more aggressive and it maybe some fear and they just said okay then we may need to do something with this child, we can’t handle him”.

Researcher: So are you saying that teacher expectation does play a part in contributing?

Traditional General Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“ Oh absolutely, absolutely, just like you know if I don’t expect them to be able to learn chances are they won’t learn cause I’m not gonna spend much time attempting to work on something that I know that will not work”.

Traditional General Teacher Suburban School B stated:

“I think it (teacher expectation) plays a great role, when teachers don’t expect their kids to do anything, then they don’t do anything and I can say from teaching in an inclusion classroom, I really feel that me as an inclusion teacher I expected my kids to do the same

as any other student...maybe not as fast or as the exact same problem, but be able to understand the same concept as all the other kids understood”.

Researcher: So are you saying that teacher expectation has a lot to do with whether or not African American students might be referred to special ed? “I think it has a lot to do with it”.

Traditional General Teacher Suburban School B stated:

“I think that that’s probably the, the root of the problem um when, when these boys come to school and the teachers don’t expect the same thing from them as they expect from everybody else it’s an easy thing for them to do is put them in special ed, because they feel like they can’t learn, but if you don’t expect for them to learn of course they’re not...nobody rises to low expectation”.

Alternative General Teacher Inner City School H stated:

“Teacher expectation is everything to a student’s success in the classroom. When teachers don’t think very highly of a student particularly African American males then it plays a major part in their problems in the classroom. Sometimes teachers don’t want to go the extra mile to help, so it is easy to refer them to special education. Pass the buck so to speak”.

Alternative Special Teacher Inner City School H stated:

“Well, um teacher expectation I think is important you know there are a lot of teachers who go into the profession for the wrong reason and when they get there they don’t have the expectations that they need to be successful in the classroom and a lot of times that expectation is low for African American students. I would like to think sometimes, but I

think it's a big factor when teachers don't expect these young men, or African American men to do better. Um so, I, I think the role that teacher expectation play there is that no expectation, get out of my room , let somebody else handle it, or you know they give up on them easily".

Participants were also asked: **How do you think teacher expectations impact a teacher's decision to refer an African American male to special education in this district?**

One teacher indicated that if the expectation is low, then the teacher is more apt to refer the student than if the expectation is high. This teacher further indicated that if the teacher expectation is low, then the referral rate is going to be very, very high verses where in my opinion the teacher expectation is very high, the referral rate is going to be much lower.

Alternative general teacher at Suburban school E stated:

"I think that teacher expectation is some of the reason teachers in this district may refer African American males to special education, but there could be other variables. Many times referral to special education is needed when a teacher has done all he/she knows to do to help a struggling student, but sometimes too they just don't know what to do. For those teachers with low expectations, I would guess that they do refer more.

So....yes if they don't have high expectations then that may be a huge problem. Just think if half of the teachers in this district had low expectations of AA males, you can imagine what that will do for our district when it comes to disproportionality of African American males in special education".

Alternative special teacher at Inner city school H agreed with Alternative general teacher at Suburban school E and stated:

“Well, in this district (PAUSE) I, I am not sure why, but I know that teacher expectation, it, it, um plays an important role. I can see where it a teacher has no expectation, then they are not willing to go the extra mile to help a student or an African American males who might be having a problem, so yeah the same hold true for this district. I hate to think that teachers in this district would have low teacher expectations for these students or any student for that matter”.

Traditional general teacher at Inner city school D did not agree that teacher expectation impacted referral to special education in this district for African American males. This teacher stated:

“I think they make their referrals based on whose not performing up to their expectations”.

African American males in Richmond County school district are overrepresented in special education programs for mild intellectual disabilities. Based on the data obtained from Georgia Department of Education, these students are placed in special education programs at a much higher rate than their representation in the total school population. Participants were asked to tell how they think teacher expectation may have played a role in contributing to this problem. Twelve of the sixteen participants (75 percent) agreed that when teachers have low or no expectation for African American males, this increases the chances that they will be referred and ultimately placed in special education programs. Two other participants thought that a lack of understanding the culture of African American males may have contributed to teachers having low teacher expectations for African American male students. Additionally, teachers were asked: How do you think teacher expectation impacts a teacher’s decision to refer an African

American male to special education in this district. Many of the participants agreed that if the expectation was low for African American males, then teachers were more apt to make referrals to special education for these students. Some of the participants cited other reasons as to why referrals were made to special education. One participant thought that African American males were referred not because of teacher expectation, but that these students were referred for other reasons such as the teacher wanting to get the child out of the classroom who may be having academic or behavior difficulties. Another participant thought that teachers just don't want to deal with these boys. Overall, twelve of the participants (75 percent) agreed that teacher expectation or the lack thereof may have contributed to African American males being referred to special education in this district.

Category Four- Teacher background, training certification and experience

Teachers come from a variety of backgrounds, and bring with them a myriad of experiences and training. Each of the participants responded to Research sub question #2: **How do you think teacher background, training and experience and certification impact teachers' decision to refer an African American male to special education?** An analysis of the responses indicated that teacher experience and teacher background played a major role in referring African American males to special education. All of the sixteen participants (100 percent) agreed that a lack of training, background and experience impacted a teacher's decision to refer African American males to special education. One participant indicated "If a teacher has not been exposed to a certain culture of students, then the teachers' thinking might be skewed in terms of how to handle certain situations, how to identify reasoning for certain behaviors. I think that exposure has a lot to do with why African American males are tested more frequently than

their counterparts”. Another participant agreed that the experience played a role in the referral to special education, but argued that the training does not play a role in contributing to the problem. This participant purported that experience impacted a teacher’s decision to refer to special education. This participant stated:

“Well, um, for the training, I don’t think the training does so much, but the experience that the person has. I think that plays more of a part than the training because the training, you’re only going to learn so much, it’s actually getting out there and getting involved and seeing what’s going on for yourself because when you do the training, it’s mainly learning theory and sometimes theory just don’t work. You have to have actual application you know hands on application that gives you a feel of what’s going on”.

Traditional General Teacher Suburban School E stated:

“I do think the background of the person will have an impact on their expectation. Um, I, I believe that probably the way the teacher learn, their involvement with diverse groups of people, or lack thereof is going to have an impact on how they view others, especially black boys. I am not sure it’s so much the training as it is the teachers’ behavior and their background. You understand? I think it’s more of the background, because the background, you know you get the book knowledge and everything through the teaching program, but we know that the training, the actual stuff , the good stuff that you know is gonna help you in your classroom it’s what you get on the job. So I think that maybe the background of the teacher is the thing that’s going to be having the greatest impact on them as opposed to the training”.

Alternative General Teacher Suburban School E echoed the sentiments of Traditional General Teacher at Suburban School E and stated:

“Whatever experience a teacher brings into the classroom, will definitely impact how they relate to kids, especially African American males. You have some teachers who were born with a silver spoon in their mouths and can’t really understand some of the backgrounds these kids come from. Also if the teacher hasn’t been trained and has the experience with working with African American males, then I think they are more inclined to refer them to special education”.

When asked how do you think teacher background, training and experience impact a teacher’s decision to refer an African American male to special education, all sixteen of the participant’s, traditional and alternative teachers agreed that background and experience impacted a teacher’s decision in referring African American males to special education. The 16 participants pointed out that a lack of experience and the background of the teacher were two contributing factors that impacted a teacher’s decision to refer an African American male to special education.

In addition to teacher background and experience, participants were also asked to explain how teacher training through a traditional teacher education program or an alternative teacher preparation program may impact referral to special education for African American males. There are three main types of teacher certificates—the traditional teacher certificate, alternative teacher certificate, and emergency teacher certificate. Within each are variations in program activities, program length, and duration of the certification. Some authors also refer to provisional or temporary certification, which typically means a teacher has satisfied the

requirements of a standard certificate but either has little or no teaching experience (or no recent experience), or has taught in a different locale. Traditional teacher certificates set the greatest requirements for teachers. Teachers typically earn a bachelor's degree in education, and must have finished student teaching under the direction of a supervisor or master/mentor teacher. Alternate routes to certification often ask that participants have at minimum a bachelor's degree, but the degree need not be in education. The emergency teacher certificate has the least requirements. Fifteen of the sixteen participants (94 percent) indicated that a lack of training through the alternative teacher education program may impact referrals to special education programs. One participant favored the traditional certification route and indicated that when you go through the traditional route, you are given those diversity courses, you are given those courses in special education, you're given all of those things, and you're given those experiences. In contrast to the one participant, another participant believed that both traditional and alternative teacher programs provide adequate procedural information for any teacher to make a quality decision about referrals and placement of African American male students in special education programs.

Summary

Ten of the sixteen participants (62 percent) agreed that a lack of training in the Alternative teacher preparation program impacted the referrals of African American males to special education programs in Richmond County school system. These participants argued that in the Alternative teacher preparation programs, teachers are not provided with sufficient training as well as experiences in working with diverse learners, especially African American males. Participants also stated throughout the interview responses, that the training in the Alternative

teacher education program has an important role in determining referrals of African American males to special education programs. Traditional general teacher at Suburban school B stated: “If you’re an accountant and you automatically, you all of a sudden decide you wanna be a math teacher and you’ve never really dealt with children, ever been in a classroom since you graduated from high school, I don’t think you’ll be able to deal with that as well as someone who has gone a traditional route”.

The researcher asked each participant: **What do you think may have contributed to African American males in Richmond County school district being referred and overrepresented in special education programs for mild intellectual disabilities?** Some of the responses included: “ I feel that is because the mild intellectual disabilities is the easiest one to categorize any child and it’s the easiest one I think for a child to fall up under. And I think that’s why we have so many in Richmond County”. Most of um the children that were in the mild program they are pretty much put in the program early on. Maybe like the first grade or so. When they had problems with vocabulary and things of that nature and they got and for some reason they are classified as mild seemingly through the lack of vocabulary, but um as they get older, many of em, you know we find that they really are not mild, they may be SLD, and some of the students that we had just over the years, they’ve even exited the program all together because they weren’t mild they just had um problems with language while they were growing up or while younger and um they had issues with that and they overcame those um language barriers and um vocabulary issues and many of them overcame the language barriers through speech therapy and with that they weren’t really mild, they just were behind”, “I think that has to do with the reading and exposure, and the lack....When I say that...I mean the lack there of”.

Participants also felt that behavior was a contributing factor that may have influenced a teacher's decision to seek assistance outside of their classroom or refer an African American male student to special education in this district. "Sometimes the teachers will send a student out of their classroom because they really don't know how to handle um discipline issues whether it's because they're not accustomed to kids not doing what they need to do behaviorally speaking or it could be that it could be that they you know that they just hasn't had that training, they just don't know what to do". Another participant at Suburban School E stated:

"If they're misbehaving, and it's a constant. They may be misbehaving because you know they just don't want anyone to know that they don't understand, so okay I'm failing cause I'm misbehaving, I'm failing not because I'm having problems, or I have those gaps in learning if you will. So if it goes on enough, the teachers aren't gonna allow them to sit in a classroom and disrupt the entire learning process. So, if that happens enough then I think probably immediately they're gonna seek some outside assistance and eventually they're gonna turn to special ed if it's not corrected".

Researcher: So you're saying if the behaviors are chronic then teachers are more inclined to seek assistance outside of the classroom? "Absolutely" replied participant at Suburban School E.

All sixteen of the participants agreed that when students have chronic behavior problems, constantly disrupts the class, can't sit still, teachers simply want them out of their classrooms. One teacher indicated that behavior is crucial to a class and especially for a teacher who came through the alternative certification route. This teacher indicated that:

"You just don't go in expecting to have behavioral problems that keep you from doing your work. You expect to have some kids with learning problems, but not behavior, and

I can see where teachers would use or use the special education to get them out of there, because we all know that no learning takes place if the environment is not conducive for it. So, I think I may have referred quite a few in my years because you know, I, I didn't know what else to do there".

Alternative special teacher at inner city school H stated:

"To tell you the truth, many of our black boys are in special education because of their behavior. I was surprised to learn that they were overrepresented in special education because of mild intellectual disabilities in this district, but if that is the case, then they probably also had some behavioral issues that landed them in special education in the first place. Behaviors problems are a huge concern for many teachers. So many times in an attempt to get order in the classroom, and especially of a student which includes African American males are chronically misbehaving, then I can see where a teacher might refer to special education. cause nothing they have tried is working, parents don't help in some cases, rewards don't work, nothing work. So, then of course I can see that a referral to special education might be in that child's future".

Data Analysis Summary

The research question posed in this study was: How do teachers influence/shape the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools? The following sub questions that were considered are:

1. What facet of teacher expectations shape/create disproportionality of African American males in special education programs?

2. How does teacher background training and experience influence their decisions to refer African American males to special education? (For example: experiences and training through a traditionally certified teacher preparation program or alternative teacher preparation program, years of teaching experience and expectations for African American males.

Overarching Research Question: **How do teachers influence/shape the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County middle schools?** A review of the interview responses indicated that variables such as low or no teacher expectation, teacher training and experiences, teacher certification, cultural differences, system demographics and behavior problems influenced the disproportionality of African American males in Richmond County School district.

Research Sub Question 1: **What facets of teacher expectations shape/create disproportionality of African American males in special education programs?** All of the participants agreed that when teachers expect student to do well, students tend to do well and that when teachers expect students to fail, students to fail. When asked by the researcher how does this apply to African American males who are experiencing academic difficulties and ultimately referred to special education programs, the responses included comments such as: the expectations for African American males is not great, black males are often portrayed as uneducated, and thugs, and things of that nature and so when in the classroom people bring what they see with them, if the expectation for African American males is high, then the results (meaning student achievement) will be high. Another participant believed that African American males are not expected to perform at or above grade level and this attitude is presented by the

student's teacher, yielding the product after its kind. This participant stated "African American students experience academic difficulties which initiates the referral process into special education services". Two participants agreed that African American males get referred for special education because some teacher has given up on them and not found a way to best teach them, and that African American males already have struggles, stereotypes, cultural, family and other issues to deal with, so if a teacher doesn't understand all of these things and try to work with them and not just write them off or refer them to special education, then most times they will fail".

Research Sub Question 2. **How does teacher background training and experience influence their decisions to refer African American males to special education? (For example: experiences and training through a traditionally certified teacher preparation program or alternative teacher preparation program, years of teaching experience and expectations for African American males?** In analysis of the participant's interview responses, all sixteen of the participants indicated that teacher training and experience play a major role and ultimately influenced teacher's decisions to refer African American males to special education. Participants argued that when teachers do not have the training and experience needed to be successful in the classroom, they will not have the experiences needed in order to be successful in teaching African American male students. Fifteen of the sixteen participants (94 percent) agreed that teachers who enter the profession through an Alternative teacher certification route tend to have the most difficulty in the classroom setting. These participants indicated that the alternative teacher certification route does not offer adequate training and preparation for teachers to address the needs of diverse learners or provide the necessary experiences that are needed to be

successful in the classroom. Six alternatively certified teachers indicated that the alternate route did not provide sufficient training and experience. Eight of the traditionally certified teachers also agreed that the Alternate route played a role in a teacher's decision to refer an African American male to special education in this district. Two participants did not agree that the Alternative teacher preparation program had an effect on referrals of African American males to special education. These three participants believed that the training they received through the Alternative preparation program was just as effective as the training and experiences received through the Traditional teacher preparation program. Overall the responses to the research question and sub questions were answered. All sixteen of the participants indicated that teacher expectations (low or no expectation) played a role in African American males being referred to special education in middle schools in Richmond County school district. Fifteen participants (94 percent) agreed that teacher who entered the teaching profession through the Alternative teacher preparation program referred African American males to special education in this district because a lack of training and experience provided in the alternative preparation program.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to review and discuss the findings of the study. Sixteen middle school teachers from two Suburban Middle Schools and two Inner City Middle Schools from Richmond County, Georgia, participated in the study. Interviews were conducted and transcribed. Each participant was assigned a title based on the type teacher certification and school location. Participants were identified as traditional certified general education teacher, traditional certified special education teacher, alternative certified general education teacher, alternative certified special education teacher. Schools were identified as Suburban middle

School B and E and Inner city middle school D and H. After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the interview responses for the purpose of identifying common categories. The categories that the researcher determined from the literature included: Category 1: African American males representation in special education, Category 2: Disproportionality at the middle school level, Category 3: Teacher expectation and its role in influencing/shaping disproportionality, and Category 4: Teacher background, training and experience, and type teaching certification and the impact on referral to special education.

Throughout the interviews, the following themes emerged from the participant's responses: low teacher expectation, system demographics, teacher training and experience, behavior of the student, cultural differences and physical/biological changes of the African American male. Of these themes, low teacher expectation and teacher certification and training yielded the most responses to answer the research questions. The researcher did not find any unexpected responses or inconsistent responses among the respondents.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of teacher expectation on African American males in special education in Richmond County Middle Schools. The researcher conducted a review of the literature. The review of literature consisted of studies regarding the overrepresentation and disproportionate representation of African American males in special education programs. This chapter includes a brief summary of the role of teacher expectation on disproportionality of African American males in Richmond County middle schools. It presents a brief summary, an analysis of the research findings, conclusions, and a discussion of the research findings, implications and recommendations.

The research design chosen for the study was qualitative. The researcher chose the qualitative research method because it was person centered. Additionally, the researcher felt that the qualitative method was the best procedure to use in order to collect data so that the research question and sub questions to be studied would be answered more truthfully and soundly. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to develop a framework and an organized way of analyzing the data obtained from the interviews.

The population for the study consisted of sixteen middle school general education and special education teachers in Richmond County, Georgia. The participants were identified as Traditionally certified general education and special education teachers and Alternative certified general education and special education teachers. Participants were selected from two suburban middle schools and two inner city middle schools in Richmond County school district. The

sample was chosen for convenience and because the participants were appropriate informants because they possessed the knowledge, understanding, and experience that the researcher needed in order to conduct the study.

The researcher chose semi-structured interviews as the method of instrumentation for the study. The interview questions reflected the review of literature completed by the researcher. Each of the participants in the study was personally contacted by the researcher in order to establish an interview time. Fourteen of the sixteen interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participant at his/her assigned school, and two of the interviews were conducted by telephone at the participant's request. Interviews were completed and transcribed. Each participant was assigned a name based on the type teaching certification they held and their position in the school district. The transcribed data was disaggregated according to common themes. Four categories were established from the literature.

After reviewing the transcribed interviews, categories were determined based on the literature review. The categories consisted of African American males' representation in special education, teacher expectation and its role in influencing and shaping disproportionality, disproportionality at the middle school level, teacher background, training, experience, and type teacher certification and referral to special education. Themes originated from the interview responses from the participants.

Discussion of Research Findings

The researcher compared the findings of this study with the findings of other similar studies in the review of literature. The first category: African American male's representation in

special education. The findings related to this category were mixed. Student behavior, cultural differences/background of the teacher, teacher perceptions, system demographics, lack of teacher experience and low teacher expectation were reasons identified among the participants as to why more African American males are placed in special education in this school district. Student behavior, system demographics and low teacher expectations yielded the most responses. Seven of the sixteen participants felt that behavior of African American males was the contributing factor in them being referred and identified for special education in this school district. This finding supported the findings of Zimmerman (2005) in which the researcher suggested behavior likely increased or contributed to a child being referred for special education consideration. The findings in this study also supported the works of McMillan, Gresham, Lopez, and Bocian (1996), who found that in addition to low achievement, African American males were referred for behavior problems at a higher rate than any other ethnic groups. These authors purported that African American males who were identified as having behavior problems were believed to be at higher risk for placement in special education programs. Five of the sixteen participants believed that system demographics impacted the disproportionate number of African American males in special education in this school district. One participant stated that because the school system is predominately African American, that would impact the disproportionate number of African American males in special education. Another participant stated that you have to look at the demographics of the district because our school system is predominately black.

The second category: Disproportionality at the middle school level. Each participant was asked: What facet of teacher expectation do you think may have contributed to disproportionality at the middle school level in Richmond County School district? Based on the

2007 data obtained from Richmond County School district (2007), disproportionality existed at the middle school level for African American males. All of the participants felt that middle school years were challenging for all students. Some of the common themes that emerged from the interviews to explain why disproportionality existed at the middle school level in this district were: socio-economic status, hormonal changes, little or no teacher expectation, and lack of African American male teachers. Little or no teacher expectation and yielded the most responses. One participant thought that a lot of teachers have given up on African American male students at the middle school level, and have lowered their expectations of these students. This participant stated: "I think a lot of middle school teachers are buying into that they're brain dead in the middle school, and they are not challenging them necessarily as much as they could when they see students who I won't say can't do, but don't do, I think many times they just give up and say well I've done all I can do, that's somebody else's problem and there again I think part it may just be pure laziness--- on the teacher's part". The finding in this study supported the conclusion from Obikor (1999) that for many African American males, how teachers understand and interpret their world views and how they are expected to perform affects their motivational and self-concept interpretations. When expectations of these students are inappropriately lowered or raised, how they interpret their self understanding, self love, and self empowerment may be affected. Rubie-Davies (2006) further supported the findings in this study. This author concluded that teacher expectation has a stronger effect from teacher to student than from student to teacher, and that it is through expectations that certain learning opportunities are provided for students depending on the teacher's high or low expectation of their students.

The third category: Teacher expectation and its role in influencing/shaping disproportionality. The researcher asked each participant: What role do you think teacher expectations play in contributing to disproportionality of African American males? All sixteen of the participants agreed that teacher expectation played a major role in contributing to the problem of disproportionality of African American males in the school district studied. One participant stated that “Teacher expectation is the root of student achievement. Without high expectation for students, especially African American males, their achievement and success is pretty much “shot”. This participant continued to say that “If a teacher does not have high expectation for African American males, this will most likely play a role in them being referred to special education which could ultimately lead to so many African American males being identified and placed in special education”. Another participant agreed that teacher expectation is the root of the problem and felt that when these boys (African American) come to school and the teachers don’t expect the same thing from them as they expect from everybody else, it’s an easy thing for them to do is put them in special ed, because they feel like they can’t learn. This teacher believed that “nobody rises to low expectation”. The findings further supported the work of Kunjufu (2008) who suggested that teacher expectations, even when based on erroneous information, can influence the academic performance of children especially African American males. All of the participants felt that when teachers have low or no expectation for African American males, this influences their academic performance. Lumsden (1997) affirmed that when teachers hold low expectations for certain students based on their race and socioeconomic status, they are perpetuating the disproportionate number of children identified with specific disabilities and placed in more restrictive environments. The researcher posed a second question

to participants: When teachers expect students to do well, students tend to do well, when teachers expect students to fail, students tends to fail. How does this apply to African American males who are experiencing academic difficulties and ultimately referred to special education programs? All of the participants agreed that low expectations will result in failure from the student. One participant pointed out that the media plays a part in the expectation for African American males. This participant contended that black males are often portrayed as uneducated, and thugs, and things of that nature, and so when in the classroom people bring what they see with them, and that shows in the way, in the number of special ed African American special ed students we have. This supports the argument of Gibbs (1988) who pointed out that African American males face unique challenges that may compromise their success in school. This author indicated that African American males are often described using disparaging terms such as dysfunctional, lazy, uneducable, or dangerous. The author further indicated that these terms reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate the “invisibility” of black men. The findings in this research study are supported by the conclusions of Grant (1985) that found teachers on average, hold lower expectations for African American males and teacher’s low expectations often lead to student disengagement which, in turn lowers the teacher’s expectation further.

The fourth category: Teacher background, training and experience. Each participant was asked: How do you think teacher background, training and experience impact a teacher’s decision to refer an African American male to special education and explain how training through a traditional teacher education program or an alternative teacher preparation program may impact referrals to special education programs for African American males. All of the participants agreed that a lack of training and the background and experiences that a teacher

brings to the classroom impacts how they relate to students particularly African American males. A traditionally certified teacher participant stated: "If you're not used to being around African American males and you don't come from that background, and you don't understand it, I think it's more difficult for you to interact with that child and you have a tendency to just you know, it's almost like it's a problem that you wanna cover up or push to the side or you wanna have someone else deal with it because you don't know how to". An alternative certified teacher participant agreed and indicated: "Teacher background, training and experience have a great impact on the decisions made by teachers to refer African American males to special education. Little background, training and experience can lead to students being mis-identified resulting in overrepresentation. This decision may be personal biases and prejudices about African American students in general. Sufficient training, experience and background in the area of student learning styles, development, behaviors and changes in behaviors enable an educator to make a quality decision based on the criterion for identification and classification". Another traditional certified teacher participant felt that the background of the teacher impacted a teacher's decision to refer an African American male to special education rather than their training. This participant was adamant that the background of the person will have an impact on their expectation and that probably the way the teachers learn, their involvement with diverse groups of people, or lack thereof is going to have an impact on how they view others, especially black boys. The findings from this research support the sentiments of Baird (2008). Baird contended that teachers come with many culturally driven values that shape the instruction in the classroom and that if those values are not congruent with the learning styles and needs of

minority students, then there is a greater likelihood that minority students may not be able to achieve at the same level of the majority group.

Teachers enter the profession through a traditional teacher education program or an alternative teacher preparation program. The researcher interviewed eight traditionally certified teachers and eight alternatively certified teachers from inner city and suburban middle schools in Richmond County school system. Fifteen of the sixteen participants agreed that a lack of training through the alternative preparation program impacted the referral to special education. The majority of the participants indicated that the alternative teacher preparation route did not provide sufficient training and experiences that are offered to teachers who enter the profession through the traditional route. One participant indicated that when you go through the traditional route you are given those diversity courses, courses in special education and those experiences needed in the classroom. Another participant stated that when you go in through the alternative way like she did, that you are blown away because it's either something that you hadn't learned yet or something that you didn't get through your studies". Additionally, another participant concluded by saying "Bottom line is that teachers who go through the fast track education program do not get the same opportunity to learn and gain the valuable on the job experiences before becoming a teacher. Not only are behavior problems challenging for these teachers, but students who are struggling academically pose a problem to these teachers". The findings in this study supports the findings of Lumsden (1997) who contended that teacher experience in working with diverse students have a tangible effect on their academic success. All of the participants in the study felt that the experience and training that a teacher has ultimately impacts

their success in working with diverse learners and that a lack of training, background and experience may impact referral to special education programs for African American males.

Procedures

The focus of this study was to understand the role teacher expectations has on disproportionality of African American males in special education. The researcher chose descriptive methods since the primary objective was to summarize the data collected from interview responses. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher thanked the participants for agreeing to participate. The researcher explained the role of the researcher and the participants in the collection of data. Any questions posed by the participants were answered by the researcher prior to and during the interview process. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the researcher explained to the participant what he or she was actually going to do, informed the participant as to what would be done with the findings, explained why each individual had been chosen to participate, and what they might gain from participating. The researcher gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and information regarding the problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. Consent to participate in the interview was secured prior to beginning each interview. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Every attempt was made to make the interviewee feel at ease since the main disadvantage named by Gall (1999) to the use of a tape recorder was that the presence of a recorder alters the process somewhat. Using a tape recorder, all interview questions were asked and based on the responses given, the researcher made adjustments to the questions which added clarity. The tape recorder provided a complete verbal record which was not possible with simple note taking. This allowed for the information

to be transcribed and studied much more thoroughly. A separate tape for each interview was used and each was labeled as suggested by Marshall & Rossman (1999) to “keep data intact, complete, organized, and accessible”.

Once the data was obtained from the interviews, the researcher transcribed each interview and used the descriptive method to characterize and summarize the entire set of data to transform the data into a more manageable format. Each transcript was read multiple times and careful attention was given to emerging themes. The responses were analyzed and grouped into categories to aid in understanding the role of teacher expectation on disproportionality of African American males in special education in the school district studied. As the categories were determined, the data was evaluated for its usefulness, allowing for some data to be put aside. Wolfe (1994) stated in the “very act of constructing data out of experience, the qualitative researcher singles out some things as worthy or not and relegates others to the background. Marshall and Rossman (1999) reported that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. Creswell (2005) reported that the process of data analysis involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. Creswell further defined data analysis as using open-ended data which requires asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants.

Conclusion

From the information gathered, it can be concluded that the findings in this study supports the findings of previous studies as outlined in the review of literature. This research

added to the existing body of literature and added some insight into the disproportionate placement of African American male students in the Richmond County School District. From the data the researcher gathered, all sixteen of the participants agreed that students are evaluated for special education through the Response to Intervention process. The process is used when students are experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties. Students are put through a three tier intervention process which includes intervention strategies and instructional accommodations prior to a referral to special education. The finding from the participants' responses concluded that low, no, or a lack of teacher expectation, student behavior and demographic factors impacted the referrals and disproportionate representation to special education for African American males in Richmond county school district. Participants argued that when teachers have low expectations for students, especially African American males, this perpetuates the referral to special education programs. In regard to working with diverse learners in the classroom, fourteen of the participants agreed that a lack of training offered through the alternative teacher preparation program did not adequately prepare them. Participants agreed that teachers who entered the profession through the alternative teacher preparation program were not provided with enough training in special education and working with students from diverse populations who may be experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties in the classroom. Finally, all 16 participants agreed that chronic inappropriate behaviors influenced a teacher's decision to refer African American males to special education programs, and may impact the disproportionate placement for these students.

African American males are continuing to be placed in special education classes at a startling rate. While African American males are not immune from having any type of disability

that would cause them to be placed in special education they should not be more susceptible to the disorders than any other racial or ethnic group. African American males may learn differently, but it does not mean that they cannot learn and that they cannot learn in the general education setting. It is up to educators and administrators to salvage the educations of students that are being isolated and in many cases losing their chances at a quality education in special education classrooms. Educators must step up to make education comprehensive, challenging, and most of all inclusive. The problem of disproportionate representation of African American males in special education is a complex and persistent one that must be examined in the context of larger societal and social phenomena. In seeking solutions to this persistent problem, we must first focus on better preparing teachers to address the needs of ethnically and culturally diverse students. Improving teachers' capacity to provide culturally responsive instructions to African American students is likely to improve student learning.

Implications

The findings of this research have many implications for this district as well as other districts struggling with similar problems. Some of the sub themes that emerged from the interview responses to explain disproportionality of African American males in special education in this school district included: low, or no teacher expectation, lack of training and experience, type teaching certification, lack of cultural awareness and discipline problems. This school districts must make a conscious effort to address these themes so that the problem of disproportionality of African American males and other minorities are not disproportionately placed in restrictive class environments outside of the general education classroom. School

leaders in this district should design staff development training to address the following themes that yielded the most responses from the participant's interview responses:

Low, or no teacher expectation. Teacher expectations have been shown to have an indelible effect on student performance. Namely, that student performance will rise to the level of expectation or fall to one that is lower than their potential. The self-fulfilling prophesy of teacher expectations has a direct effect on student performance especially for African American males who are at risk for special education placement. The teacher's use of control oriented behaviors that encourage or discourage student inquiry will motivate or de-motivate a student to excel. School leaders should constantly convey to teachers that high teacher expectation is linked to high student achievement and success in schools.

Lack of teacher training, and experience. Teachers who enter the teaching profession through the traditional or alternative certification route should be provided with extensive training prior to entering the profession. This training includes cultural awareness, and other diversity issues. School systems that employ teachers should make a conscious effort to communicate with leaders of teacher education programs in colleges and universities to ensure that teachers are being trained to work with and teach diverse learners. Human Resource departments who hire teachers should make certain that teacher candidates have the experience and training needed prior to being placed in a classroom. Minimal training and experience should include student teaching experience and courses in the nature and characteristics of students with disabilities. Additionally, training should be provided to assist teachers with making appropriate accommodations and modifications for struggling students which could potentially decrease the referral to special education for African American males and other minority populations.

Type Teacher Certification. Teachers who enter the profession through an Alternative Teacher Preparation program may not always receive the level of training that is generally received through a Traditional Teacher education programs. Therefore, it is imperative that Human Resource departments who hire teachers from alternative preparation programs carefully evaluate their program of study to ensure that these teachers have had adequate training that is needed to address students of different cultures as well as training to address learning styles and differences.

Behavior Problems. Participants in this study indicated that African American males are referred to special education for chronic disruptive behaviors and classroom interruptions. Participants report that many times teachers don't know what to do to adequately address behavior or discipline problems in the classroom other than refer these students to special education. To address this concern, school leaders must focus on providing teachers with classroom management strategies aimed at reducing student misbehaviors in the classroom. These strategies include positive behavior interventions, strategies and supports that focus on increasing desirable behaviors instead of punishing undesirable behaviors. Schools should emphasize the importance of making positive changes in the student's environment in order to improve the student's behavior. Such changes may entail the use of positive reinforcement, modeling, supportive teacher-student relations, family support and assistance from a variety of educational and mental health specialists.

Lack of Cultural Understanding. To improve the understanding of culturally diverse students, school leaders must start with a culturally responsive curriculum to increase knowledge about students' culture, language and learning styles and modify the curriculum and instruction

accordingly. This research indicated that more emphasis needs to be placed on training and experience for teachers of diverse learners. Teachers need to be aware of issues surrounding students from diverse populations. Efforts should be made by colleges of education and other teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers have been provided with culturally and linguistically based experiences that will enhance their teaching of students from diverse populations.

More research needs to be done on the role teacher expectation play on the disproportionality to special education for African American males. Teachers need to be aware of the challenges faced by African American males as well as the stereotypes that society has on African American males. The findings in this research study from the participants' perspectives concluded that low or no teacher expectation, chronic disruptive behaviors, teacher training and experience impacted referral and disproportionate placement to special education for African American males in Richmond County school district. The findings in this study may be used for Schools of Education at the post secondary level, public school leaders and administrators and teachers to increase the awareness of this long standing problem of disproportionality of African American males in special education programs. Placing African American males in special education and restrictive classroom environments should be taken more seriously by teachers and school personnel to avoid overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs more than their representation in the general education setting.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made for further research. This study should be expanded to a larger population which includes more middle schools in the state of Georgia. Such a study would allow this district to compare the results of this study with other middle schools in the state of Georgia. It is further recommended that an expanded study be completed that includes the views of elementary and high school teachers to determine if differences in school level has an effect on disproportionality of African American males in special education. While this study produced demographic information of the selected schools, and background information of the participants, no attempt was made to correlate demographics or teacher background to participant responses. Formulating a study to ascertain if school demographics or teacher background impacts the referral and disproportionate placement of African American males would be a valuable addition to the literature in hopes of shedding some additional insight into whether or not teacher backgrounds and school demographics played a role in this long standing problem of disproportionality.

To further address the problem of disproportionality of African American males and other minorities, school personnel should approach this problem through a focus on prevention. That is, schools need to develop policies, programs, and goals designed to (1) prevent general education at-risk students from developing a disorder, (2) keep diagnosed students from moving to more restrictive environments, and (3) assist placed students to be transitioned into less and less restrictive settings. In addition, interventions that address administrative procedures,

educational programs, and teacher competence, teacher training and experiences are needed to achieve these goals and avoid further jeopardizing the schooling of vulnerable students.

Finally, this study should be replicated to determine if changes in the referral process for special education in this district (Response to Intervention) has had any impact on the number of African American males being referred and ultimately placed in more restrictive environments. With this new referral process, (RTI) schools are required to provide levels of intervention strategies and accommodations for a specific time frame to address academic or behavioral difficulties for all students experiencing academic or behavior difficulties prior to a referral to special education. This new process is intended to eliminate teachers referring students to special education without prior documentation of an attempt to address the academic or behavioral concerns.

As the demographics of our nation's schools become more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse, school leaders must closely examine disproportionality to create equitable learning communities. Administrators should take a close look at school practices that may reduce disproportionality, including prereferral interventions, instructional practices in general education, personnel preparation, and professional development, to improve student outcomes and reduce the disproportionate representation of African American males and other minorities. As these practices are implemented appropriately and consistently, the opportunity for all children to reach their potential may be achieved.

For African American males who are consistently placed in special education programs more than their white counterparts, this researcher believes that these students may suffer some emotional affect and issues with their self concept. Many scholars have noted the stigmatizing

effects that placement in special education has on students. The misplacement of an African American male in a special education program from a general education program may produce a change in a child's self-worth, personal goals or achievement.

Teachers and school administrators in this system should make a conscious effort to focus on special education. Not only should education and training efforts focus on the laws, but on the definitions and labels also. Teachers should understand what these labels and categories mean for the student. Greater understanding and training around these issues along with system-wide initiatives, will impact the problem of disproportionate representation.

Another recommendation from this research is in the area of Human Resources. Efforts should be made to attract and retain African-American teachers, particularly African American males. Culturally responsive teaching does not always come from teachers with the same cultural background as the students they are teaching. However, there are many benefits, including an impact on disproportionality, to having culturally and linguistically diverse teachers and staff. The first step in promoting cultural awareness and culturally responsive teaching is for teachers, administrators, and other school staff to learn about the cultures from which their children come and to carefully examine all the policies, practices, and curriculum used in the school to identify any areas of possible bias (Slavin, 2009). This is an essential step to establishing cultural awareness and culturally responsive teaching into a school setting or classroom. Each and every student needs to be made to feel welcome and as equally important. For this to be accomplished, materials, policies, and curricula cannot be focused on one particular cultural group. The use of cultural awareness education can help to ensure that no students are subjected to any bias in the school or in the content that is being taught. Education that focuses on cultural awareness

addresses the concept of equality in education, or the concept that every student is provided access to the same learning materials and curricula regardless of their cultural group. By providing each student with the same learning opportunities cultural bias becomes lesser in the school and classroom setting (Slavin, 2009).

As an educator, and program specialist employed in this school district, one major duty and responsibility in this position involves determining eligibility, and placement for students who have been referred to special education. In this position, this researcher has observed inadequate research interventions, or a lack of appropriate modifications and accommodations provided to specific students prior to referring to special education. Many times the information brought to the table did not document the results of interventions and the student's response to the intervention. This research has shed some light into the severity of the problem of disproportionality especially for African American males. This researcher learned from the interview participants that the majority of the participants were not adequately trained to work with struggling students and were not aware of the nature and characteristics of disabilities that may exist in the classroom.

After conducting this research, this researcher is more committed to making sure that students who are referred for special education have had appropriate researched based interventions provided to them prior to making a decision to place students in special education programs away from their peers and in most instances in more restrictive environments. These researched based interventions include individualized instruction, after school tutoring, and weekly progress monitoring to address the identified deficit areas academically or behaviorally.

Dissemination

Research results should be communicated to school level administrators as well as Schools of Education. School level administrators and other educational leaders need to be knowledgeable about special education and the nature and characteristics of the specific disabilities. Additionally, school leaders need to have knowledge about learning styles, different modalities or learning, and other factors that may impact a child's academic or social emotional development. Having this knowledge will assist school leaders and teachers in decreasing the number of African American males and their disproportionate representation in restrictive educational placements. The information obtained from this study could be useful to special education and general educators who work with African American males and other minority students to increase the awareness of this long standing problem and the problems associated with the overrepresentation of this population of students in special education programs.

During weekly and monthly scheduled team meetings, results of this study will be shared with special education program specialists, teachers and other school leaders who make decisions regarding special education placement for African American males. Upon request, the results of this study will be shared with all of the participants who participated in the study. Participants will also have the opportunity to obtain additional information about disproportionality of African American males by emailing the researcher.

In this research study, this researcher attempted to explore a very complex phenomenon through interviews and with people who are central to the processes that occur. The issue of disproportionate representation of African American males in special education has been

examined in this local school district to gain an understanding of the problem of disproportionality of African American males at the middle school level. Participants have identified and revealed personal and professional causal factors that may have impacted disproportionality. As a critical researcher, it is imperative to push for action around this issue. To know that African American males continue to be disproportionately represented in special education programs in this school district and do nothing about them would be a travesty. It is this researcher's hope that district officials will take these findings and suggestions and implement changes.

Concluding Thoughts

Disproportionality of African American males in special education remains an important topic of research. Federal law has long been concerned with providing equity and academic parity for the nation's children. However, the disproportionate representation of students' in particular racial or ethnic groups in special education is a national longstanding issue that has been debated, investigated, and litigated by advocacy groups, and the research community. It is imperative that others continue this line of research to fully understand the causes of disproportionality and how to assess and address it at both the state and the district level. Only then can we truly ensure that the educational needs of children of all racial/ethnic backgrounds are being met and improve outcomes and results for all students.

Before the problem of disproportionality can be addressed, school administrators and staff need to become aware not only that restrictive disproportionality exists, but also that it is discriminatory and harmful. School districts need to periodically review pupil data relative to race and gender to determine the existence and extent of this situation within their schools.

Educational restrictiveness has received some attention in the professional literature but there is little evidence that it is systematically being addressed in the schools. Perhaps one of the most direct ways to reduce the disproportionate restrictiveness for racial minorities is for schools to mandate that the initial placement for all students should be in the least restrictive placement. That means that students identified as needing special education supports might first only receive assistance from an intervention specialist who serves the child within the general education classroom or on a pullout basis. At most, the student might be served in a resource room. If it is determined that the student needs more intensified instruction within a more restrictive setting, then the student is moved to another class that provides more supports.

Education of African American children and particularly African American males must involve a plan that is an intricate component of both pre-and in-service training for the perspective and current educators. As old belief and value systems are not easily changed, training must indicate the gains that African American males can and must achieve that will positively impact society as a whole. When educators are aware of the unique factors involved in the education of this population, this knowledge can replace counter-productive beliefs and value systems. Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children fail to meet their potential. Many students, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that sort some students into high-quality programs and other students into low quality education. This researcher believes that schools must replace the “sorting paradigm” with an education model that sets high expectations for all students, and ensures that all students receive a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The United States is a multiracial, multiethnic society. In order for students to achieve to high standards, access to the general education curriculum is essential. This means that all children, regardless of cultural background, are provided with a challenging curriculum that addresses their individual strengths and needs. The disproportionate placement of African American students, particularly African American males referred to special education challenges administrators to review their educational programs and make sure that they are serving the needs of all students. School administrators and teachers can do much to ensure positive school outcomes for all students—including African American students. The results of this study support the findings of current research studies that address the disproportionality of African American males being disproportionately placed in special education programs. The information from this study is new information that can be useful to the school district studied to address the problem of disproportionality in Richmond County School System. This researcher believes that when educators, school leaders and other school officials remove the “dis” from disability, the “ability” will appear.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	

To: Claudette Jackson Palmer
3501 Edgeworth Drive
Hephzibah, GA 30815

CC: Charles E. Patterson
Associate Vice President for Research

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: August 31, 2009

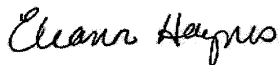
Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H10028** and titled "**The Role of Teacher Expectations on Disproportionality of African-American Males in Special Education in Richmond County School System**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B

DISTRICT APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

October 29, 2008

Dear Ms. Palmer:

I am pleased to inform you that Dr. Dana T. Bedden, Superintendent, has approved your request for research. This approval simply means that you are able to conduct your research as described in your application. If the recommendations that were discussed with Ms Harkrider are made, please provide this office with the new version.

Please note:

- your research cannot deviate from your *Request for Research* application that has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools;
- if your request involves working with any Richmond County Schools, staff, and/or students, no research can be conducted prior to receiving building-level administrator's approval;
- no research is to be conducted that interferes with instructional priorities;
- if students, parents, administrator, and/or staff will be involved with your research, you must have proper written permission(s);
- any and all costs associated with your research are your responsibility;
- **a final copy of your research is to be submitted to the Richmond County Board of Education's Office of Guidance, Testing, and Research;**
- **the Richmond County School System must have full and unlimited use of your research information and results with rights to use results as appropriate;**
- this approval is subject to revocation or modification at any time for cause by the Superintendent of Schools.

For your information, the Guidance Office is maintaining a copy of your approved research application which is available for review by RCBOE personnel.

I wish you much success with your research!

Yours truly,

Carol Rountree

Director of Student Services

*Richmond County Board of Education
(706) 826-1000 Ext. 3500*

APPENDIX C
LETTER OF PARTICIPATION



COLLEGE OF (Graduate and Professional Studies)

DEPARTMENT OF (Educational Leadership)

Letter of Participation

Dear Special or General Education Teacher:

I am currently working on my doctorate in educational administration at Georgia Southern University and am interested in understanding the role teacher expectation has on disproportionality of African American males in special education. This letter is to request your assistance to determine how teacher expectations may impact African American males being referred and ultimately placed in classroom outside of the general education setting. The name of your school will be masked and you will only be identified by the position you hold in the district. There are no known risks to you based on your participation in this study.

You are being asked to participate in a personal interview with me that will be recorded through the use of a tape recorder to ensure the information received is accurately interpreted. You may also have the option to participate via telephone if for some reason you are unable to participate in person. A set of questions have been developed to which you will be asked to respond, such as "How are students identified for special education in your school? What do you think may contribute to overrepresentation of African American males in Richmond County School district"? I understand that you reserve the right to refuse to answer any question asked and to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview should take approximately 1 hour. If you agree to participate, please sign and date below and return to me in the envelope provided within two days of receipt of this letter.

If you wish to have a copy of the results of this study, copies will be available to you upon request. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this

study, they should be directed to the IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-5466.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this study.

Respectively,

Claudette Jackson Palmer

By signing below you indicate your agreement to be a participant in this study.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Participant's signature	Date	Researcher's signature	Date

APPENDIX D
LETTER OF CONSENT



COLLEGE OF (Graduate and Professional Studies)

DEPARTMENT OF (Educational Leadership)

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Potential Study Participant:

My name is Claudette Jackson Palmer. I am a doctoral candidate at Georgia Southern University. I would like to request your voluntary participation in a research study on the role of teacher expectation on the disproportionality of African American males in special education in Richmond County school district. This study will be conducted by me, Claudette Jackson Palmer for my dissertation at Georgia Southern University. Your participation will help develop a better understanding of what facet of teacher expectations shape or create the disproportionate representation of African American males in special education.

Participation in this study is voluntary and involves no unusual risks to you. Your participation will include an interview at your school site or by telephone if you are unable to interview in person. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. A tape recorder will be used to record your responses which will be coded by the researcher. I will be the only individual who has access to your data. The data maintained will be kept in a secure location for a minimum of 1 year following completion of the study. You and your responses will remain confidential. You may refuse to participate or rescind your permission at any time with no negative consequences. If you do withdraw from the study, any information you provided will be destroyed and not used in subsequent data analyses.

If you agree to participate, please indicate the decision below. If you have any questions about the study or would like to review a detailed description of the project prior to providing

consent, please feel free to contact me at 706 -284-2296. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.

Please indicate below your decisions regarding various parts of this research study. Study participants give permission for the items checked "Yes" below:

Participant Printed Name		
_____		_____
Participant Signature		Date
Yes	No	
_____	_____	I approve voluntary participation in this research study.
_____	_____	I approve audio recording of the interview.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions will be used as a structured guide in the interviews with the study participants.

1. Tell me about your role in working with students in special education?
2. How are students identified for special education in Richmond County?
3. Why do you think more African American males are identified for special education in this school district?
4. African American males are placed in special education programs at a much higher rate than their representation in the total school population. What role do you think teacher expectations play in contributing to this problem?
5. Based on the 2007 data obtained from Richmond County School district, disproportionality existed at the middle school level for African American males. What facet of teacher expectation do you think may have contributed to this problem?
6. How do you think teacher background, training and experience impact a teacher's decision to refer an African American male to special education?
7. Explain how you think teacher training such as training through a traditional teacher education program or an alternative teacher preparation program may impact referrals to special education programs?

8. Have you worked with African American males in your classroom who were experiencing academic difficulties? If so, how did you work with this student to ensure that they were receiving the support they needed? What did you do to help?
9. How do you think teacher expectations impacts a teacher's decision to refer and African American male to special education in this district.
10. When teachers have low expectations for students based on their race and socio-economic status, how might this perpetuate the disproportionate number of African American males being identified with specific disabilities and placed in more restrictive environments?
11. One researcher argued that when teachers expect students to do well, students tend to do well; when teachers expect students to fail, students tend to fail. How does this apply to African American males who are experiencing academic difficulties and ultimately referred to special education programs?
12. What do you think may have contributed to African American male students in Richmond County School System being referred and overrepresented in special education programs for mild intellectual disabilities?
13. How might a student's behavior influence a teacher's decision to seek assistance outside of their classroom or refer a student to special education?

APPENDIX F
CODING AND ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

APPENDIX G
DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Please complete and return in the enclosed envelope. Thanks for your participation.

Name _____ School _____

Grade(s) Taught _____ Subject(s) Taught _____

How did you enter the teaching profession? Circle one.

Traditional or Alternative/TAPP

Gender _____ Race _____

Age Range: Circle One

25-30

30-35

35-40

40-50

50-60

60-70

Please indicate your preference for interviewing: Face- to- Face or Telephone

If you select telephone, please provide a telephone number where you can be reached to schedule the interview. If you select face-to-face, I will contact you to schedule a date and time that is convenient to you.

Thank you,

Claudette J. Palmer