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Policy and Leadership Accountability on Black Special Education Teacher Persistence

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Policy and Leadership Accountability on Black Special Education Teacher Persistence

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with concentration in Special Education
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Abstract

There is a persistent shortage of qualified special education teachers in schools across the country. This issue is exacerbated by the need for special education teachers of color who can help serve the disproportionate number of minority students in schools. Over time, researchers and government entities, alike, have considered ways to increase the recruitment and retention efforts of Black teachers However, given the lack of investigation regarding the needs of Black teachers in special education and what encourages their persistence, efforts to increase representation have been unsuccessful. For this reason, using a qualitative methodology, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of successful Black teachers in special education who work with students with high incidence disabilities. Findings indicate, Black special education teachers confront enormous difficulties. Along with the usual pressures that special that special education teachers encounter, Black special education teachers also indicate that there is a lack of understanding among educators, leaders, and policy makers, which is made worse by racism's overt and covert effects. To overcome these challenges, Black special education teachers leverage their strong relationships with peers to get through these obstacles and find solutions to difficult problems. By collecting stories from participants who meet this qualifying criterion and who serve in Florida's K-12 public schools, this study provides insight regarding factors that show the persistence of Black teachers in special education.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

As one of the few Black special education teachers in the state of Florida school system, I am often surprised by the lack of diversity within special education. Throughout my teaching career, I've had limited encounters with Black special education teachers, and it wasn't until I started working at a predominantly Black school late in my profession that I had the opportunity to interact with a few of them. These experiences align with the growing effort of researchers and government officials to recruit and retain Black educators in special education (Scott & Alexander, 2019). However, given the lack of investigation regarding the needs of Black special education teachers and what encourages their persistence, efforts to increase representation have been unsuccessful. Thus, this study explored the factors influencing the persistence of Black special education teachers.

When considering the history of education in America, one of the most influential policies for Black teachers and students is *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 1955) (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). With this ruling, efforts to integrate schools and provide a better quality of education forever changed the racial representation of schoolteachers. As a result of efforts to dismantle segregation, Black schools closed and, by default, Black teachers were displaced, demoted, and discharged (Oakley, Stowell, & Logan, 2009). Less than 20 years after *Brown v.Board of Education* (1954, 1955) was passed, 462 Black teachers in 127 districts in the South were dismissed from their positions (Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989).

The population of Black instructors was further lessened by the implementation of

standardized certification exams (Tillman, 2004). Tests such as the National Teacher

Examination of the Educational Testing Service were reportedly designed to "measure academic

preparation for teaching in three areas: general education, professional education, and teaching

area specialization" (Hooker, 1971, p. 12). However, as a consequence of test scores, these tests

led to the displacement of approximately 21, 515 Black teachers due to their inability to receive

passing scores (Tillman, 2004).

Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black teachers served as essential leaders for their

community; they nurtured, taught, and mentored Black students (Tillman, 2004). But over time,

this commitment to student success, once occupied by Black teachers, was lost. Since then,

policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and others like it have failed to include within their

policies language that would protect Black teachers (Orfield, 1969, as cited in Oakley et al.,

2009). And although there were some efforts made by the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the 1950s to ensure the job security of Black

teachers, no organization or policy ever focused on the job stability of Black educators for the

future (Karpinski, 2006). Furthermore, prominent researchers posited that education reform

policies were complicit and incongruent with the lack of representation of Black teachers (White,

Woodward, Graham, Milner, & Howard, 2020).

Complicity of Prominent Policies

Perhaps one of the most influential reports that led to education reform is *A Nation at Risk.*

This report proclaimed, "U.S. K-12 educational achievement was on a downward trajectory" and

therefore America's education advancements were imperiled (Guthrie, 2004, p. 7). After this

report was released, the roles of teachers and schools dramatically changed. New accountability

policies emerged and delineated new roles for schools and teachers. Among these policies was

the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.* The *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* of 2001 mandated states receiving federal funds to meet six requirements:

(1) Yearly testing and assessments of student performance, (2) State standards for and assessments of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), (3) Local educational agency (LEA) identification of schools for improvement and corrective actions, (4) Reporting to parents and the public on school performance and teacher quality, (5) Eligibility requirements for schoolwide programs, and (6). In the event a school cannot make adequate progress, regarding the NCLB requirements, the school would be "sanctioned in the form of reconstitution, including school closure, replacement of faculty and leaders, conversion to charter schools, or outsourcing management to private organizations" (White et al., 2019, p. 451; P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6,319, 2002).

Almost a decade later, this policy was followed up by the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, also known as *The Race to the Top* program. This policy employed the use of federal grants to reward states for systemic reform in teaching and learning (Henig, 2013). States seeking to acquire funding were required to:

(1) Link student achievement and student growth data to the teachers of these students (2) Tie this information to the in-state programs that prepare teachers, (3) Publicly report the data on program effectiveness for each preparation program in the state, and (4) Expand teacher education programs and teacher credentialing options that are successful at producing graduates who are effective teachers. (Crowe, 2011, p. 5)

Like *Brown v. Board of Education*, these policies appear to be designed to propagate a better education system for students; however, like *Brown v. Board of Education*, these policies

possessed negative consequences for Black teachers. Common among these policies is a focus on teacher and school accountability. For Black teachers, this has materialized through rigorous licensure exams that have less than favorable outcomes for aspiring Black teachers (Nettles, Scatton, Steinberg, & Tyler 2011). These outcomes include the removal of many Black teachers, because of reconstitution mandates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, market reforms have made alternative routes to education more accessible and affordable for aspiring Black teachers, but "tend to provide less preparation for teaching" and are, therefore, complicitous in the attrition of Black teachers (White et al., 2019, p. 455). Thus, the lack of legislation geared toward the persistence of Black teachers in education proves to have negative implications (Karpinski, 2006).

Given White teachers encompass 82% of teachers within education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), increasing the recruitment and retention of Black teacher representation is critical to the education provided to students (Scott, 2018). This disparity in representation is, perhaps, most problematic within special education. Current trends indicate that Black students are often misidentified for special education, placed in more restrictive settings, and receive harsher disciplinary actions in school, because of discriminatory practices within the education system (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). This significant disproportionality is attributed to a lack of understanding of cultural differences between students and teachers (Denver et al., 2016; Jordan, 2005; Valls, 2009). These differences support the need for an increase in racial representation; however, the recruitment and retention of Black special education teachers has been slow.

Individual with Disabilities Education Act

Inspired by the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch,

Cuadrado, Chung, 2008), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 mandated

public schools to provide a free appropriate education for children with disabilities (PL 94-142).

Since the initial authorization of this law, subsequent changes have been made to improve upon

the initial mandate. Now known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), the

reauthorization of 1997 and 2004 reformed special education in several ways. Some of the

changes include imposing new accountability expectations, authorizing formula funds for states

to support special education, and mandating the least restrictive environment for students with

disabilities (Turnbull, 2005). Additionally, provisions to the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) have been used to address further shortcomings and areas of concern

specifically concerns regarding the disproportionate representation of Black students in special

education, however this problem remains persistent. (Skiba et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Throughout the nation, school districts struggle to employ and retain qualified special

education teachers (Scott & Alexander, 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education

(2017), as many as 46 states reported a shortage of special education teachers within their state

(Robinson, Bridges, Rollins, & Schumacker, 2019). This deficit in education is attributed to the

challenging working conditions faced by special education teachers (Peyton, Acosta, Harvey,

Pua, Sindelar, Mason-Williams, Dewey, Fisher, & Crews, 2020). Of all the disciplines in

education, special education has been determined to be the most challenging in which to work

(Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Throughout the literature, teachers have highlighted challenges

with students' behaviors, lack of resources, large amounts of paperwork, and stress of the job

(Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). But of all the issues asserted, the most common factors

cited for teacher burnout and attrition include challenges with student behavior (Billingsley &

Bettini, 2019), lack of administrative support (Prather-Jones, 2011), and workload manageability (Hester, Bridges, & Rollins, 2020).

As a special education teacher, it is the expectation that one is trained and skilled in teaching students with learning and behavioral difficulties (Mamlin, 2012). In this role, it is accepted that a teacher may encounter anything from a student wanting to cause harm to themselves or others, to acts of physical and verbal aggression. Managing disruptive behaviors, such as these, are a significant source of stress expressed by special education teachers (Hester et al., 2020). Therefore, special education teachers who manage the highest levels of challenging behaviors (e.g., students with emotional and behavioral disorders) have the highest attrition rate in special education (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). The extent to which this stress is placed on special education teachers contributes significantly to teacher burnout. However, the dismal attrition of special education teachers is not solely due to student behaviors. Likewise, a source for teacher attrition is excessive paperwork.

In a report completed by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, "53% of elementary and secondary special education teachers reported having spent more time completing paperwork than any other job responsibility" (Hester et al., 2020). Of all the paperwork required, none is more time consuming than the development of each student's individualized education plan (IEP). By law, each student who receives services under the specifications of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act must have an individualized education plan (IEP) (34 CFR §§300.100-300.199). IEPs are plans used to outline the support and services schools will provide to students with disabilities. In accordance with federal policy, this plan must be completed to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. In each plan, specific conditions and

specifications are used to delineate a student's most suitable education plan (Twachtman-Cullen & Twachtman-Basset, 2011).

Legally, each individualized education plan must include the following components: a student's current performance, annual goals, special education, and related services, their participation with non-disabled children, participation in state and district-wide tests, the student's measured progress, dates and places of services, a statement of the transfer of rights once reaching the age of majority, accommodations for testing and instruction, goals, objectives, and transition services needed (courses and services student will need to reach post-secondary goals) (Kupper, 2000). These components for the IEP are both vital for student plans and time consuming for teachers. In a study completed by Hester et al. (2020), one teacher had this to say about the endless paperwork, "the minutiae of paperwork and paperwork and forms and endless forms and paperwork that will want a very skilled person to quit just to end that loop. It is surely one of Dante's layers of hell!!!" (p. 355). Although this sentiment gives credence to Hagaman and Casey's (2018) finding that the planning and facilitation of IEPs drives many teachers out of special education, the lack of administrative support has been found to have the most decisive role regarding attrition (Ansley et al., 2019; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Prather-Jones, 2011).

According to Ansley, Houchins, & Varias (2019), administrators play a crucial role in framing special education teachers' working environments. Thus, 25% of special education teachers who work in urban schools will leave, due to a lack of adequate administrative support (Billingsley, 2007). Teachers are reported as more likely to stay if they receive appreciation, respect, support, and encouragement from their administration (Prather-Jones, 2011). Unfortunately, due to a lack of awareness by many school administrators, regarding how to appropriately support special education teachers, this problem persists, thus exacerbating the

underrepresentation of Black teachers in special education (Hester et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

Over the years, researchers and government entities, alike, have supported efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of Black teachers in education (Scott, 2018). This support is often attributed to the findings of several studies which indicated a decrease in student drop-out rate, an increase in teachers serving high-minority schools, and an overall improvement in the experiences of minority students as a result of Black teachers (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). However, due to the absence of investigation into what Black teachers in special education need to be retained, efforts to increase representation have been unsuccessful. For this reason, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of successful Black special education teachers, who have taught students with high-incidence disabilities in public schools for more than five years. The participants' experiences were used to offer a greater understanding of leadership and policies on the persistence of Black special education teachers. Participants' stories were also used to explain the role of race and other intersectionality's on the experiences of Black special education teachers. Together this information can be used to expand upon current literature, magnify the experiences of Black special education teachers, and provide valuable information that can be used to recruit and maintain a supply of Black special education teachers.

Research Questions

The primary questions guiding this study were:

a. What are the lived experiences of Black special education teachers?

    i. What do Black special education teachers view as influential to their persistence in continuing in their positions?

ii. How do Black special education teachers maneuver around common barriers in special education?

Significance of the Study

Since the inception of special education, Black students were consistently overrepresented in special education classes (Farkas et al., 2020). As early as 1968, researcher Lloyd Dunn presented work establishing the practices used to identify students with mild disabilities, was based on race and other intersectionality's (Paul, 2019). After this, researchers, including Mercer (1973) and Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Epps (1983) also asserted the practices used to categorize students into high-incidence disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities [LD] emotional and or behavioral disorders [E/BD], and mild intellectual disability [MID]) were "plagued with conceptual and practical problems" due to ill-defined and poorly conceptualized practices (Ysseldyke et al., 1983, p. 165–166). As a result, Black students continue to be misidentified for special education, placed in more restrictive settings, and receive harsher disciplinary actions.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Black students represent the top 2% of students with disabilities served under IDEA. However, they comprise less than 25% of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in America (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In education, the term "significant disproportionality" is used to explain the overrepresentation of students of specific ethnic groups in restrictive settings, special education classes, and exclusionary discipline practices (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020).

Although the overrepresentation of Black students in special education has been a consistent problem, for years, the federal government has made efforts to establish legislation to

address this issue. This can be seen with IDEA, which requires all state public schools to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) that serves the needs of students with disabilities (Gardner & Miranda, 2001). Additionally, amendments have been added to address the disproportionality of minority students in special education settings. Changes in Part B of IDEA now require states to gather and analyze school data, to determine if inappropriate identification is taking place and to address any instances when it does occur (34 CFR §300.600(d)(3). Unfortunately, these efforts aim to treat the symptoms and not the root of the problem (Fong, McRoy, & Dettlaff, 2014).

The significant disproportionality of Black students, and the lack of representation of Black teachers is believed to be caused by the early beginnings of education in America (Artiles, 2011). Given schools were traditionally designed to assimilate diverse subgroups to the dominant White middle-class culture (Trainor et al., 2019), policies were designed to deter Black teachers while promoting the beliefs and norms of the White-middle class (Jennings & Lynne, 2009). This perpetuation of "Whiteness" has led to biased attitudes and perceptions that frequently influence the referral process for Black students (Blanchett, 2006; Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020; Campbell-Whatley, 2003).

Currently, the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) referral process is often initiated based on teacher recommendations (VanDerHeyden et al., 2003). A recommendation that identifies high incidence disabilities through a subjective process. After a teacher deems a student needs academic or behavioral support, a series of pre-referral and referral processes occur, to determine if the student is eligible for special education services. Key to this process are special education teachers, as they can provide both informal observations and formal evaluations during the referral process, and, upon eligibility, teachers will provide education and

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services to students. Considering these duties, those responsible for this process must be qualified, experienced, knowledgeable, and, more importantly, culturally sensitive. Unfortunately, due to a nationwide shortage of qualified special education teachers (Peyton et al., 2021), these crucial positions are often left vacated or filled by teachers who are less than qualified for the position and who do not possess the cultural sensitivity necessary to objectively evaluate and support Black students (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). For this reason, an exploration of the experiences of Black teachers is needed to understand what efforts can be used to attract and reduce stressors on Black special education teachers' persistence.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as the guiding theoretical framework for this study. It is most suitable for this study because it addresses racialization and asserts that "racism and racial subordination" are common occurrences in the everyday experiences of people of color (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 18). Critical race theory provided a lens through which to analyze the ubiquitous nature of unconscious discrimination on the racialization of Black special education teachers' retention and experiences. Because this study focuses on the experiences of Black special education teachers, it is imperative to be cognizant of the manifestations of race and racism on participants' experiences. Throughout the literature, Black teachers often reference instances of perceived racial inequality (Duncan, 2019; Mensah, 2019; Mosley, 2018; Pabon, 2016). Using CRT as my framework provided the necessary language and concepts to make sense of those experiences, as well as possible assumptions for those experiences. Additionally, critical race theory provided a framework to connect this research purpose.

Critical race theory provided a lens for critical discernment. The tenets of CRT, which include permanence of racism, counter storytelling, Whiteness as property, interest conversion,

and a critique of liberalism, offer explanations of race and racism that may be experienced by Black teachers (Lynn & Dixon, 2013). In critical race theory, race influences the implementation of policies, leadership, and practices in the teacher workforce (White et al., 2020). I used critical race theory to understand how the successful persistence of Black special education teachers merges with issues such as the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, and interest conversion. CRT is also relevant for this research study given CRT helps to preserve the voice of Black special education teachers while challenging the dominant ideologies of the role of race and special education teachers' experiences (Lynn & Dixon, 2013).

Delimitations

This qualitative study explored the experiences of Black special education teachers who worked with students with high-incidence disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities [LD], emotional and or behavioral disorders [E/BD], and mild intellectual disability [MID]) for more than five years in Florida public schools. To consider ways to increase the representation of Black special education teachers, this study focused on teachers who currently work within the field. It is known that many teachers leave within the first five years of entering the profession (Goldring et al., 2014); therefore, considering the experiences of teachers who have taught over this threshold provides a guidepost to understand teachers who have had a greater chance of success, thus potentially providing greater depth to interpret their experiences teaching in the field.

Limitations

This study uses a qualitative methodology. A limitation of this type of research is the credibility and/or validity of researcher interpretation. Ratcliffe (1983) stated, "one cannot observe or measure a phenomenon without changing it" (p. 150). Key to convincing the reader this study is valid, trustworthy, and relevant, is providing transparency (Tuval-Mashiach, 2015).

Transparency was achieved by presenting my positionality and reflexivity in the methods section of this study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), this is a strategy for addressing the integrity of a study.

Additionally, the small sample size (e.g. number of participants, only in Florida, etc.) of this study can be seen as a limitation. The positivist paradigm is based on the notion that a large sample size "improves consistency in data and creates a better representation of populations" (Park, Konge, & Artino, p. 691, 2020). However, the nature of qualitative research does not seek this quality, thus a larger sample is not needed. This study intends to understand the perspectives of participants and to illuminate the stories of Black special education teachers using qualitative methods to obtain novel stories.

Assumptions

Qualitative research includes the assumptions and beliefs of researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The experiences, orientations, and world views of researchers influence how research is designed, conducted, and concluded. By understanding a researcher's assumptions, readers are made aware of the values and expectations that influence data interpretation. To ensure the integrity of this study and provide transparency, I provide my assumptions below.

My first assumption is that participants will be open and honest about their experiences in special education. I believe that, by using participants' stories, I have answered my research questions and gain an understanding of the experiences of Black special education teachers. The overall intent of this paper was to understand what factors influence the persistence of Black teachers in special education and, because of this, I designed this study accordingly.

In addition, I hold a priori assumptions regarding the field of special education for Black teachers. As a Black special education teacher with at least seven years in the field, I pursued this

study with perceived notions regarding the experiences of Black special education teachers. I assumed the school environment plays a significant role in teacher persistence, in addition to internal motivations and passion for the field. I assumed that current and future policies can assist or hinder the success of Black teachers and increase their representation.

Definitions of Key Terms

Black

The U.S. Census Bureau defines Black as a person whose origins trace back to any one of the Black racial groups in Africa (de Brey, Musu, McFarland, Wilkinson-Flicker, Diliberti, Zhang, Branstetter, & Wang 2019).

Special Education Teachers

Using Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) data, Boe et al. (1997) defined special education teachers as public school instructors who teach in grades K-12 in one of the specializations within special education. This definition excludes itinerant teachers, long-term substitutes, and part-time teachers.

Attrition

Teachers who leave the profession completely (Boe et al., 1993).

High Incidence Disabilities

High incidence are believed to be a categorization that disenfranchises specific populations of students (Karagiannis, 2000). This label includes the following categories: learning disabilities (LD), emotional and or behavioral disorders (E/BD), and mild intellectual disability (MID).

Disproportionality

According to the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2008), racial disproportionality is loosely defined as the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of

individuals of color, in relation to their proportion to the general population.

Urban Schools

Richard Milner (2012) offered three categorizations for urban schools: urban intensive, urban emergency, and urban characteristics. These labels offer multiple explanations used to describe urban schools. For the purpose of this study, I will use urban intensive to describe urban schools for this study. This definition describes schools located in large metropolitan cities that manage outside factors such as poverty, housing, and transportation.

Overrepresentation

Overrepresentation means being represented excessively (Merriam-Webster, 2021). In special education, this occurs when the percentage of minority students placed in special education classes exceeds the percentage of minority students in the total population of students (Miles, 2016).

Barriers

A barrier is something that impedes access or movement. In education, this includes institutional, social, and systemic elements that make teaching challenging (Olson & Roberts, 2020).

Teacher Retention

Michelle Arroyo (2021) defined teacher retention as the proportion of teachers retained from one year to the next.

Persistence

The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) defined persistence as the "continued enrollment at any institution." In relation to teaching, teacher persistence is the act of remaining in education year after year.

Policy

The National Center for Disease Control and Prevention defined policy as a law or regulation enacted by the government or other institutions. Both federal and state policy play a vital role in the experiences of teachers and students in education.

School Leaders

Peter Northhouse (2016) defined leadership as an act with four components: "leadership is a process, leadership involves influence, leadership occurs in groups, and leadership involves common goals" (p. 3). Thus, leadership is a process where an individual influences other to achieve a common goal. In education, school leaders work to influence others to achieve particular goals for education.

Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

Little scholarly research has been published on the experiences of Black special education teachers. Therefore, for this literature review I address contributions to the field regarding the experiences of Black teachers in education in general. In this synthesized review, I present studies from 2010 to 2021 on the challenges, practices, and policies which influences the perseverance of potential and current Black teachers. Each is described within the context of training to teach or teaching. This chapter concludes with a review of possible solutions for each barrier and a summation of the implications of the literature on the experiences of Black special education teachers, who have taught for more than five years in Florida's public schools. This will be achieved by looking at the primary questions guiding this study:

The primary questions guiding this study were:

a. What are the lived experiences of Black special education teachers?

    i. What do Black special education teachers view as influential to their persistence in continuing in their positions?

    ii. How do Black special education teachers maneuver around common barriers in special education?

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct this review, I mostly utilized the following electronic databases: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO, and Google Scholar, in addition to select supporting professional literature (books, government documents, etc.). Using the ERIC

browsing thesaurus to control vocabulary descriptors, the following search terms were used to sort and analyze studies within the database: *Special Education Teachers, Teacher Persistence, Teacher Burnout, Teacher Recruitment, Teacher Education Program, and African American Teachers*. The term African American was solely used as a controlled vocabulary term to make my search more efficient. This is the only time this term is used throughout this study.

For this contemporary search, peer-reviewed articles published within the last ten years were used. This initial search yielded seven articles, using some combination of the specified search terms. To expand upon this search, the same descriptors were used, again, with the term *special education teacher* removed. This new search focused on Black teachers, in general, and generated more than 400 articles. To refine this search, duplicates were removed, and articles were evaluated based on their ability to provide context to focus on the study.

After each article was read, each study was then exported into an Excel spreadsheet that organized each study into seven categories (author/date, theoretical/conceptual framework, study purpose, methodology, relevant findings, limitations, and implications for future research). These studies were, then, evaluated and organized based on three factors: (a) policies or strategies used to attract Black teachers, (b) challenges to entering the field, and (c) challenges working in the field. Once each article was organized within the table, I completed a thematic analysis of the data. From this analysis, two categories (teacher preparatory programs and teaching) and two themes (challenges and recommendations) emerged.

Analysis of Literature Review

To present my findings, I organized my results into two sections: teacher preparatory programs and teaching. The following section organization highlights how Black teachers' experiences are organized within the literature. I have used this organization to frame each

section's focus while presenting the connection between the two themes revealed in the thematic analysis. Additionally, these experiences will be framed around critical race theory.

Teacher Preparatory Programs Barriers

Teachers often begin their careers in education having received some form of formal training. For some, this means a degree in education, received from a traditional four-year teacher preparatory program. While, for others, this includes a license to teach received from an alternative licensure program. With both approaches being used to enter the field, research shows Black teacher candidates enrolled in more alternative licensure programs than traditional four-year preparatory programs when entering the field (Cross, 2017). Additionally, women candidates preferred traditional programs opposed to alternative licensure programs favored by men (Farinde-Wu et al., 2019). Traditional programs were found to provide more comprehensive instruction on teaching pedagogies that better prepare teachers for the classroom and increase teacher retention, opposed to alternative licensure programs that offer a quick, flexible, and more affordable teaching option that provides students the ability to work while they learn (Scott & Alexander, 2019).

Prior to deciding to enroll in a traditional or alternative route, Black teacher candidates cited more lucrative occupational choices and negative personal experiences as reasons to stay away from the profession completely (Bryan & Williams, 2017). Although these reasons have kept some from entering the field, there are still some who persist. Unfortunately, many of these teacher candidates would later find challenges with their teacher preparatory programs. In my review of the literature finances, teacher licensure exams, and a lack of support were the biggest hurdles encountered by Black teacher candidates (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Like for any student, the cost to attend college is challenging, but for Black students who

sometimes derive from low- and moderate-incomes, it can be particularly challenging. Nationwide, the cost to attend a college or university ranges from anywhere between $17,000 to $47,000 (NCES, 2019). Students, who enroll in schools, finance this expense through scholarships, financial aid, and grants, and many students subsidize the cost for tuition, books, and housing through student loans. For Black students, choosing to take out student loans is a necessity, as Black students are more "likely to come from economically disadvantaged families" (Jackson & Reynolds, 2013, p. 336). Unfortunately, Black students acquire a greater risk from student loan debt (Houle, 2013). Thus, Black students often seek programs that offer some type of financial support for their degree or license (Scott & Alexander, 2019). This is what makes alternative licensure programs appealing, as they are a much cheaper option than traditional university programs (Scott, 2019). Even still, alternative routes maintain White interest. Programs like this boast an increase for Black teacher candidates, while maintaining normative culture and knowledge that often discredits other cultural perspectives (Brown, 2014).

However, traditional university programs better prepare teacher candidates for teacher licensure examinations (Angrist & Guryan, 2004). This small yet vital quality of a traditional route is crucial for all teachers, because all states require teacher candidates to pass some form of general knowledge, basic skills, and subject area competency exam (Carver-Thomas, 2018). For Black teacher candidates this can be even more challenging as these tests are cultural bias and appear to support "continued homogeneity of teacher education" (Sandles, 2020, p. 70). Black teachers fail these exams at a higher rate than their White counterparts (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Likewise, the cost to repeat the exam further discourages interest and progress toward teaching.

Lastly, many Black teacher candidates expressed struggling to make connections with their programs due to the lack of student and faculty diversity (Carver-Thomas, 2018). This was

even more predominant among Black males who are underrepresented in teacher programs

(Scott & Rodriguez, 2015). Having the support of peers and faculty, who share similar

experiences, is essential to student success in navigating the campus and academic coursework

(Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011). According to Tinto's (1993) theory of college retention,

"the frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and students is an independent predictor

of student persistence" (p. 5). Having the personal bonds of peers and faculty would also aid in

dealing with instances of discrimination and microaggression, detailed in many of the

experiences of Black teacher candidates (Mensah, 2019; Scott & Rodriguez, 2015).

Teacher Preparatory Programs and Black Teachers' Experiences

As aforementioned, teacher preparatory programs are instrumental in the education and

persistence of Black teachers. Unfortunately, due to a lack of support, teacher licensure exams,

and the high cost for these programs, it is challenging for many teacher candidates to find

success within these programs (Farinde-Wu et al., 2019). To address the barriers discussed

above, researchers recommend various solutions for recruiting and retaining Black students in

teacher education programs. One such approach is developing a pipeline that can be used to

attract Black students to teacher certification programs (Scott & Alexander, 2019; Scott, 2019).

This includes conducting targeted recruitment efforts by intentionally marketing faculty and staff

diversity, tuition support and incentives, and testimonies of Black students who have found

success within the program (Scott, 2019). By addressing the barriers that deter most students,

head-on, programs are likely to find more success in attracting students to their programs

(Wallace & Gagen, 2019). Scott and Alexander (2019) also recommend recruiting from the

paraprofessional pool as well as high school students. Direct recruitment of groups as such is

believed to be just as influential as current recruitment efforts, such as the Reserve Officers

'Training Corps (ROTC) and other magnet programs (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Lastly, schools much address the issue of whiteness as property. This is seen by which "preservice teachers that possess the experiences, perspectives, knowledge and dispositions aligned with and valued by the dominant White society find reinforcement and success" in teacher education programs (Brown, 2014, p. 337).

Once students are recruited and enrolled in teacher education programs, researchers recommend providing appropriate services and support to aid in student persistence (Pabon et al., 2011). For many Black students, this begins with financial aid. Some form of financial assistance can help decrease the burden of fees and increase the retention of Black students (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). Current programs that have used financial incentives to attract and retain Black teacher candidates include Minnesota's Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color Program, as well as California Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program. These programs provide school staff, such as paraprofessionals, upwards of $4,000 per year to earn a bachelor's degree and obtain their teaching credentials (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

After the financial burden of school is alleviated, it is recommended that schools develop systems of support that include both faculty mentors and peers (Scott & Alexander, 2019). Black students in teacher education programs often expressed a need for Black mentors (Scott, 2019). Since most faculty in teacher education programs being predominantly White (Milner & Howard, 2013), this influences, "how curriculum is designed and what is taught; how students are recruited and selected; how new faculty members—and who those new faculty members are—are recruited, hired, and supported; how urgently a program works to address race and ethnicity; and the extent to which faculty members who work with race are supported" (Sleeter, 2017, p. 156). To counter this White interest, teacher education programs must work to employ a

diverse staff. Having representation helps students build a greater sense of racial identity, a quality that has a significant relationship with academic persistence (Scott & Rodriguez, 2015). It is also vital that Black students who may not have received exposure to college-level coursework while in high school be given instructional support while in college (Wallace & Gagen, 2020).

Additionally, advocates support the use of alternative pathways (Scott & Alexander, 2019). According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), Black students are more likely to have used an alternative route when entering the teaching profession. In several studies, Black students praised their experiences with alternative programs (Scott, 2019; Scott & Alexander, 2019; Scott & Rodriguez, 2015). Students referenced program features such as autonomy, flexible scheduling, and cost, as attractive qualities for persistence (Scott, 2019). The success of alternative-route programs can be seen in plans such as The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Scholarship program, which boasts an 84% program completion rate (Bierda & Chart, 2011).

Barriers to Persistence: Working Conditions

Although efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of Black teachers begins with teacher preparatory programs, maintaining a supply of Black teachers in the class is equally challenging. When considering teacher turnover rate, job satisfaction was found to be a strong indicator for teacher retention and persistence (Stockard & Lehman, 2004). However, when reviewing the literature on the factors that influence job satisfaction for Black teachers, working conditions emerged as the most prominent cause for teacher attrition. Yet, the working conditions for many Black teachers are less than favorable. For example, minority teachers are overwhelmingly employed in high-poverty, high-minority, and urban communities (Ingersoll & May, 2016; Sun, 2018).

High-minority and urban schools have been found to be a preference for many Black

teachers (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2016; Pabon, 2016). According to

Fareinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018), these schools are favored because they resemble and exhibit

characteristics similar to the communities in which many Black teachers were raised.

Unfortunately, some of these schools have some of the worst working conditions, including:

"overcrowded classrooms, high student drop-out rates, inadequate funding, lack of resources,

low parental involvement, low graduation rates, and low standardized test scores" (Farinde,

Allen, & Lewis, 2016, p. 122). Additionally, these imperiled schools run the risk of school

closures, displacement, and the possibility of the conversion into a charter or private organization

(White, Woodward, Graham, Milner, & Howard, 2020).

By working at some of the most troubled schools, Black teachers are often confronted with

students who perform below grade level. As a result, they are then pressured by administration

and accountability policies to produce results (Sun, 2018). For novice teachers, these high

expectations can be discouraging (Pabon, 2016). In a study regarding the experiences of Black

female teachers' preparation and retention, participants reported being underprepared for the

responsibilities of the job (Farinde-Wu et al., 2019). Teachers in this study reported struggling to

meet the needs of their underserved students, failing to provide culturally responsive teaching,

and scrambling to attend to the requirements for their special education students. Regrettably, the

experiences found within this study are all too common for many Black teachers. Many Black

teachers, who enter the field, lack the knowledge and practice needed for their role and are,

therefore, two to three times more likely to leave as a result of this (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

But, for the few who can manage the demanding workload, their persistence can also be

challenged by microaggressions and feelings of isolation (Mosley, 2018). In both minority and

predominantly White schools, teachers reported different instances of microaggressions (Mosley,

2018; Pabon, 2016). For men, they were often regulated to the role of the school "disciplinarian" (Pabon, 2016), while women were cautious of being labeled as the token "angry Black" teacher (Mensah, 2019). The occurrences of racism and microaggressions ultimately contribute to the high attrition rates for Black teachers (Duncan, 2019). In addition, racial battle fatigue can also lead to feelings of isolation, therefore, contributing to the abandonment of their position (Mosely, 2018).

These feelings of isolation and racial fatigue can be soothed by the role and support of school administrators; however, many Black teachers assert a lack of administrative support in their roles (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016). Participants described schools as hostile working environments where administrators micromanaged teachers' adherence to the curriculum and student performance (Pabon, 2016). A critical component for these working environments is accountability policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top, and Obama's American Recovery Reinvestment Act. These policies made teachers accountable for providing a higher academic standard for education, that is measured by standardized testing while also giving leaders "unchecked powers to target Black teachers in punitive ways" (White et al., 2020, p. 456). In many schools, administrators adopt a coercive power for leadership that penalizes and punishes teachers who do not meet a one-dimensional standard for student success (Northouse, 2016). Thus, teachers report this as being one of the top two reasons for leaving the field (Farinde et al., 2016).

Among this list of reasons, teachers also cited salary as one of the biggest causes for teacher attrition (Farinde et al., 2016). Teachers are some of the lowest-paid individuals of any profession. Thus, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), the average based salary for teachers is $39,000. For Black teachers, the lack of compensation that meets the demanding workload of their position is cause for their departure. In Farinde et al. (2016), many

participants complained about the low salary constraints that hindered their ability to obtain financial security and mobility that did not require them to work a second job, and because of this, many left the field.

Teaching Persistence

The challenging working conditions in which Black teachers find themselves will need to improve drastically before an increase will ever occur (Carver-Thomas, 2018). First, researchers suggest support should include mentorship, professional development, and coaching (Scott, 2019; Sun, 2018). Mosley (2018) offered racial affinity professional development as a tool to address feelings of isolation and racial battle fatigue, common among Black teachers' experiences. Professional development, as such, provides a safe space for Black teachers to receive support and education. Using professional development opportunities, such as these, have been found to increase teacher retention (Sun, 2018). Additionally, coaching programs have been found useful for teachers in urban schools (Hunter & Redding, 2022).

Secondly, support can and should include the support of the administration. School administrators set the tone for the school (Sun, 2018). School administrators should create environments where teachers are respected, valued, and empowered to do their work (Farinde et al., 2016). Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018) recommended school administrators hold consistent faculty meetings with teachers who need support, provide aid and continuous support for classroom disturbances, and hold an active presence within the classroom and the hallway. To assist principals in harvesting leadership skills that will increase teacher retention, Carver-Thomas (2018) recommended districts use in-service leadership training, such as McREL Balanced Leadership Development Program, designed to assist principals in developing essential leadership skills. The implementation of this program resulted in a 7-point reduction in teacher

turnover (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Additionally, because of the demographic divide found in today's schools, school leaders need to possess an understanding for navigating the diverse perspectives found within their schools (Horsford et al., 2011). School administrators must recognize the influence of racism and the affect it has on education practices and Black teachers (Davis et al., 2005). With current leadership standards employing a color-blind approach to racism, inequitable and unjust practices persist and harm Black teachers (Davis et al., 2005). Therefore, to promote a sustaining environment that maintains and supports Black teachers, school administrators need to create environments that support the values and beliefs of various ethnic groups (Khalif et al., 2016).

In addition to support, Black teachers attributed dissatisfaction in their job to the lack of advancement opportunities in education (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017). Unlike most professions, opportunities to advance in education are not easily obtained through years of experience (Scott & Alexander, 2019). For those who seek to advance in education by obtaining advanced degrees, the lack of accessible opportunities for advancement leaves many to remain in the classroom (Farinde et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to provide opportunities for advancement.

Lastly, teacher compensation is a way to support teachers. To combat the dismal pay for educators, research supports providing teachers competitive salaries equivalent to the work they perform (Scott & Alexander, 2019). With the price of recruiting, hiring, and replacing teachers coming at great cost for districts everywhere, school districts and states should rebalance their budgets to provide teachers the financial compensation they deserve, to cut costs needed to hire and train new teachers (Farinde et al., 2016).

Implications for this Study

This review of teachers' experiences, particularly that of Black special education teachers, provides an opportunity to understand their experiences in the schools. Recognizing the experiences of Black teachers in teacher education programs are crucial first steps in the persistence of Black special education teachers. In these programs, future teachers learn, develop, and master skills necessary for the classroom. Moreover, the material covered in these courses has the potential to help or hinder the future success of teachers. Unfortunately, this literature review indicates a deficit in the quality of training provided and curriculum needed for Black teachers. Many of the participants in the studies struggled to manage the demands of their job and expressed that both traditional and alternative routes left them underprepared for their role (Farinde-Wu et al., 2019).

Black teachers within the studies described their experiences as hostile, oppressive, and tense work environments, where teachers contended with microaggressions and isolation while teaching in schools that lacked support, autonomy, and resources to deal with the many demands found within their schools. Instead of building upon teachers' strengths and potential, school organizations were run like mechanical bodies that use routinized approaches, for efficiency purposes (Morgan, 2006). These routine approaches operate from a power paradigm that often disenfranchises Black teachers' experiences and skills.

Additionally, educational policies, such as market reforms and accountability policies, obstruct the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers in today's schools (White et al., 2020). Since the publishing of *A Nation at Risk*, there has been a political movement to improve schools across the United States (Henig, 2013). As a result, new policies and reforms have created a less than favorable outcome for potential and current Black teachers. Accountability policies, such as

teacher certification exams, have made it difficult for many Black teachers to enter the teaching profession. Meanwhile, market reforms have given way to for-profit programs that make alternative certification programs more affordable for Black students than traditional licensure programs that better prepare teacher candidates for the teaching profession (White et al., 2020).

Among the issues found within my review, no element had a greater role than school principals and education policies. Together, these two influence the overall environment in which Black teachers find themselves in which, ultimately, affects their persistence. To help emphasize the influence of school leaders and education polices on Black teachers' experiences, I offer a brief discussion on their significance.

Implications of School Administrators & Policies

Educational policies and school principals have a profound influence on instruction and school environment. School policies set the standard for which schools are expected to perform, while school administrators define which standards will be enforced. Together, both have the power to shape teachers' experiences in a positive or negative way. Unfortunately, when reviewing the literature, both have negatively affected the persistence of Black teachers. To start, policies are created without any consideration for existing structural inequities (Gilburn, 2005). Policies such as the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, *Race to the Top*, and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* have linked teacher performance with student achievement, but they do not consider the role this legislation has on the persistence of Blacks teachers (White, 2018). Moreover, the schools most often targeted by state accountability policies, are the very schools at which many Black teachers are employed (Hunter & Redding, 2022), thereby making Black teachers' fortuitous victims of education policies.

Additionally, the commodification of education has given rise to market-based policies

that push a free market ideology (Scott & Holme, 2016). Many supporters of these policies strive to commoditize the shortcomings of education by developing programs and schools that address needs in education (Lewis & Young, 2013). However, the development of programs such as alternative teacher preparatory programs are believed to provide less preparation for teachers (White et al., 2019; Zeichner, 2018). This is particularly concerning for Black teacher candidates, because these programs are a preferred route to teaching (Cross, 2017). The competition of traditional, rather than alternative routes to education foster dissonance between receiving comprehensive training and affordability (White et al., 2019).

Although school policies are a standard practice for governing districts and schools everywhere, school administrators' interpretation and enforcement of policies play a critical role in the environment and, ultimately, the persistence of Black teachers (Walker et al., 2019). With many Black teachers preferring to work at the schools that accountability and market-based policies target, Black teachers are placed at a great risk for attrition (Hunter & Redding, 2022). This is because administrators of these schools often adopt a business approach for leading (Spring, 2011). They implement an audit culture that constantly measures and evaluates schoolteachers (Apple, 2005). Teachers in these environments are expected to adhere to strict curriculum guides that devalue the cultural and pedagogical contributions of Black teachers (White et al., 2020). In these environments, administrators construct culturally oppressive environments which are not conducive for persistence (Flessa, 2010).

The Use of CRT to Study Black Teachers in the Field of Education Leadership & Policy

It is argued that "critical race theorist views mainstream education as one of the many institutions that both historically and contemporarily serve to reproduce unequal power relations and academic outcomes" (Zamudio, 2011, p. 4). At the micro and macro level education

leadership and policies exist in a system that perpetuates racism (Capper, 2015). In this system, high stakes accountability measures are implemented on the premises of holding teachers accountable (Diamond & Spillane, 2004). Any teachers who are unable to meet these expectations are met with corrective action. Unfortunately, this corrective action too often falls upon Black teachers. With many Black teachers choosing to work at Title 1 schools, many find the odds stacked against them (Sun, 2018).

With Title 1 schools representing many of the low-achieving and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, the pressure from accountability policies can be all consuming. For instance, in a study on the effects of education accountability on teachers, researchers found teachers performing at schools with low achieving performance were more susceptible to burnout (Berryhill, Linney & Fromewick, 2009). Teachers at these schools referenced limited teacher self-efficacy, changes in teachers' practices, limited time for too many tasks, and concerns regarding the fairness of standardized test scores as points of contention. For many teachers these stressors compounded by issues of race and equity are the cause for teacher dissatisfaction and ultimately their departure.

To address this, critical race theory challenges policymakers and school leaders to examine the racialization of schools. Both policymakers and school leaders must acknowledge the role race, whiteness as property, and the notion of colorblindness in relation inequitable schools. Failure to understand and acknowledge these issues further maintain and reproduce unfavorable outcomes (Horsford, 2010). To combat this issue, "CRT introduces the fact that racial progress cannot be made by politics or policy alone—because racism cannot be remedied without substantially recognizing and altering White privilege" (Lopez, 2003, p.83). This calls the attention of school leadership. Given that school leaders hold the power in altering White

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privilege within their schools, it is necessary that school leaders be trained in how to deal with race (Capper, 2015). Additionally, given the focus on accountability common within todays schools, it is imperative school leaders are properly trained to confront these realities (Brown, 2005). Unfortunately, many leadership preparation programs fail to inform and prepare school leaders of the "organizational frameworks and leadership theories" that privileges the White majority and disadvantages others (Lopez, 2003, p.70). Many leadership programs use a color-blind approach to preparation that emphasizes diversity and culture over race and ethnicity (Maylor, Roberts, Linton & Arday, 2021). This then leaves school leaders ill trained on recognizing and counteracting the negative implications of race (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015).

Today's school leaders lead a diverse demographic of teachers; thus, leadership preparation programs need to address conscious leadership standards that focus on race and equity (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015). Principal preparation programs curriculum should include "ways to disrupt the policies and process that maintain the status quo and enable the existence of unjust intuitions" (Karanxha, Agosto, & Bellara, 2013, p.1195) Providing school leaders with an understanding of racism and biases works to diminish inequities impacting Black teachers. It is also recommended educational leadership uses CRT Inventory for Leading the Elimination of Racism (Capper, 2015). This inventory helps leaders in education evaluate whether practices, initiatives, and policies perpetuate racial inequalities and how to address them within their school (Capper, 2015). Being able to evaluate practices helps school leaders work to alleviate racial battle fatigue experienced by Black teachers. Lastly, administrators should seek an authentic approach for leadership. This stance in leadership is more inclusive of teachers (Anderson, 2009).

Implications for Practice

The result of my findings indicates a need for more research on the experiences of Black special education teachers. In this review, the challenges and recommendations provide a place to begin conversations regarding teacher retention, but they do not provide a simple fix for this persistent problem. The predominantly qualitative studies do, however, contribute to illuminating the particular challenges unique to Black teachers while supplying researchers with data to build theory and to continue to research. Although there is much to be gained from qualitative studies, the lack of quantitative, mixed methods, and longitudinal studies are a loss of enriching information, for this inquiry. Admittingly, having a larger sample size or assessing the effectiveness of recommendations suggested using quantitative and longitudinal studies would enhance the findings. However, it does not divest from the shared stories being told in this literature review. Overall, the findings of this review make a charge for reform. Reform in the approaches taken to recruit and retain Black teachers in education, and reform in current policies and leadership practices.

Conclusion

Equitable opportunities for Black special education students are threatened by the pervasive shortage of Black teachers in special education. Although my review predominantly looks at the experiences of Black teachers in education, the experiences highlighted within the studies encompass many of the challenges Black special education teachers may face in their roles. Based on this review, a complete transformation of teacher diversity in special education is an unlikely reality for the foreseeable future. Despite efforts to increase teacher diversity, little has changed over the years. In order to gain sustainability in the area of diversity, federal and state initiatives must restructure current practices and policies in education. Punitive

accountability, questionable policies, and a segregated history must be reevaluated using a

critical lens.

Chapter Three: Methodology

After reviewing the literature regarding the experiences of Black teachers in education, the studies examined present an array of challenges. These studies also indicate a need for more research to be conducted. This is also noted in Billingsley and Bettini's (2019) report on the attrition and retention of special education teachers. For this chapter, I introduce and outline the methods and procedures for this study. I start with an iteration of the purpose of this study and then provide the theoretical perspectives that guided the methods for this study. Next, I discuss the qualitative methodology, selection of participants, and data collection procedures. This is followed up by an explanation of data analysis, as well as my reflexivity and positionality.

- Who: Black special education teachers who serve in Florida's K-12 public schools teaching once of the high incidence disabilities for more than five years

- What: qualitative methodology

- Where: Florida

- When: Within 2-3 months participants of consent, participants were interviewed with each interview occurring within a week with at least 2 days' time for reflection.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black special education instructors who have taught students with high-incidence disabilities in public schools for more than five years. These experiences were used to offer a greater understanding of the influence of leadership, policies, and other factors contributing to the persistence of Black special education

teachers. Participants' stories were also used to explain the roles of race and other intersectionality's regarding the experiences of Black special education teachers. This information can be used to expand upon current literature, magnify the experiences of Black special education teachers, and provide valuable information that can be used to recruit and maintain a supply of Black special education teachers.

The primary questions guiding this study were:

a. What are the lived experiences of Black special education teachers?

 i. What do Black special education teachers view as influential to their persistence in continuing in their positions?

 ii. How do Black special education teachers maneuver around common barriers in special education?

To answer these questions, the following methods were followed to find data that provides an understanding for these questions. To start, I present the philosophical foundations that guided this study.

Philosophical Foundations Guiding Study

This study is constructed on the ontological assumptions of critical theory and the epistemological assumptions of constructivism. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that considers the nature of reality (Lichtman, 2013). The ontological assumption of critical theory posits that reality is shaped by political, ethnic, social, cultural, economic, and gender-based forces (Matta, 2021). As a researcher, I believe our experiences within these elements shape our reality and, therefore, what we know. This branch of philosophy explains "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 18). The epistemological assumptions of constructivism asserts "the researcher interacts with research participants and interprets and creates their meaning of the

data" (Bogna et al., 2019, p. 468). I believe the findings of the study will be shaped by the participants and researcher. Therefore, it is important I provide readers an understanding for conclusions.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical theory and constructivism influenced this study in several ways. In addition to influencing certain assumptions brought into this study, constructivism and critical theory was used to justify the way in which I choose to collect data and answer my research questions. I used critical theory to explain the role of culture, race, politics, and other values on Black teachers' experiences in special education, while constructivism was used to guide the explanation for my findings.

Positionality

One of the primary purposes of qualitative research is to "provide an in-depth description and understanding of human experience" (Litchman, 2013, p. 17). As the interpreter of human experience and the recorder of findings, it is crucial that the researcher is transparent regarding biases and their positionality. Because qualitative research is centered on the researcher's judgment, it is essential that researchers present explanations of the guiding principles used for their study, to ensure research integrity (Woods et al., 2016). This is achieved through researcher positionality (Sultana, 2007).

Andrew Holmes (2020) stated that "positionality requires researchers to position their beliefs, views, and values as the assumptions that effect all aspects of the study before, during, and afterward" (p. 2). As a tool to establish researcher positionality, Holmes recommends locating the researcher in relation to the subject being studied, participants, and the process for collection and analysis. Applying this principle, I first present descriptors by which I identify. I am a Black female special education teacher, and I have worked in special education for more

than five years in the state of Florida. As a special education teacher, I have worked with students of varying disabilities and ethnicities at all grade levels. Thus, I consider myself an insider of this study. While I am aware of my insider status, I am also an outsider in the way I see and describe my experiences in special education. I hold the positions simultaneously and attend to them in my researcher journal. My experience as a Black teacher in special education has led to the bases of this study. Having noticed a lack of Black teachers within my field and a need for representation in the classroom, I have prefaced this study by addressing these issues. Additionally, I acknowledge that my experiences and views may potentially influence data analysis, as well as the theoretical framework chosen.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for a study provides the foundation for which all knowledge will be constructed in research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). For this study, critical race theory served as the theoretical underpinnings for collecting and understanding the experiences of Black teacher participants for this study. Critical race theory asserts that "racism and racial subordination" are common occurrences in the everyday experiences of people of color (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 18). In critical race theory, race informs the implementation of policies, leadership, and practices in the teacher workforce (White et al., 2019). The tenets of CRT (permanence of racism, counter storytelling, Whiteness as property, and interest conversion) are used to offer explanations of race and racism influence on Black teachers (Lynne & Dixon, 2013).

For this study, permanence of racism was used to provide a lens to examine the role of racism on special education teachers. This tenet asserts that racism is ingrained in the fabric of American society and, thus, must be analyzed when considering practices and policies (Hiraldo,

2010). The second tenet, counter storytelling, helped to illuminate, preserve, and challenge the dominant literature on the experiences of special education teachers. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined this tenet as a method of storytelling that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises, especially those held by the majority. Therefore, sharing the stories of Black teachers in special education will give a new perspective to special education teachers' experiences.

The purpose of CRT is to empower Black communities. However, due to racism, this will never be fully imagined because whiteness will always be at the forefront to the detriment of true Black freedom. Therefore, the third tenet of CRT, Whiteness as property was used to examine the role that racism in the form of whiteness played in the experiences of Black special education teachers. Fourth, interest conversion, asserts progress for Blacks is always linked to the best interest of Whites (Milner, 2017). One of the objectives for this study is to recommend suggestions for the persistence of Black special education teachers and their working conditions in special education. Although designed to *specifically* support Black teachers, it is essential to be mindful of how these recommendations, when taken out of context and not my intent, will always serve to the best interests of White educators and community members due to interest convergence.

I used critical race theory for this study, because it helped to understand how the persistence of Black special education teachers can be challenged by various manifestations of race, racism, and power. In my review of the literature, Black educators often referenced instances when they dealt with microaggressions, racism, and inequities within the workplace (Duncan, 2019; Mensah, 2019; Mosley, 2018; Pabon, 2016). Using the critical race theory as a framework helped to ground this study with concepts currently used within the literature. It also

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provided a lens for analyzing the data. Additionally, CRT's counter-storytelling tenet helped to forefront the voice of Black special education teachers while challenging the dominant literature on the special education teacher experience (Lynne & Dixon, 2013). To tell these stories, I have chosen a qualitative methodological approach.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative study design is most appropriate for this research study, because I am seeking to understand the experiences of Black special education teachers. Researchers, Strauss and Corbin (1998) described qualitative research as a type of inquiry that focuses on the lived experiences of people (as cited in Lapan et al., 2012). Researchers of qualitative research typically use a small sample of natural occurring phenomena from which to collect data (Hammersly, 2013). This small sample size helped to provide a rich understanding for research inquiry, because the researcher can investigate participants' values, beliefs, and attitudes (Grbich, 2013).

Additionally, qualitative research provides school leaders and policymakers an understanding of the role of policy on populations; it exposes the experiences of different demographics, evaluates the influence of services supplied, and it can be used to progress the scholarship of different concentrations (Maxwell, 2021). Merriam (2009) purported there are four major characteristics for a study to be qualitative: "fit focus on meaning and understanding; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive" (p. 14). Qualitative methods are multifaceted with a plethora of approaches to use (Grbich, 2013). One such method associated with qualitative work is narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is a method of research that centers on capturing and analyzing stories of

participants (Mertova & Webster, 2020). I have chosen to use this method because it helped to present the experiences of Black special education teachers in a way that not only preserves their voice but also validates their experiences. Employing narrative inquiry provided the best opportunity to do this. Narrative inquiry also fits within the framework of CRT's tenet of counter-storytelling. Both narrative inquiry and counter-storytelling rely on the experiences of participants stories. While narrative research describes participants' stories, counter-storytelling focuses on telling the stories of racially marginalized groups. Using narrative inquiry helped with the "coherence and continuity" of a participant's experience, because participants can relay their experiences with little constraints (Lieblich et al., 2011, p. 6).

The implementation of narrative research involves interviewing a small number of participants, gathering their stories, and chronologically ordering the meanings of those experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). This approach uses visual, written, and spoken stories of participants (Litchman, 2013). As participants construct their stories, I, as the interpreter, derived meaning from those experiences, while always being cognizant of my role and reflexivity. Additionally, narrative research is believed to be a "natural form of communication" and a better way to obtain information from participants (Grbich, 2013 p. 216). Therefore, for this qualitative study, narrative inquiry is the most appropriate approach for understanding the experiences of Black teachers in special education.

Method of Data Collection & Analysis

Data collection and analysis for qualitative research is a multifaceted laboring process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Both the collection and analysis of data is focused and tailored specifically to address the needs of the study. As the researcher, it is imperative that proper planning is taken to address the purpose of the study. My overarching research question was:

what are the experiences of Black special education teachers? When considering this question, the selection of participants is the first step in the data collection process. Since a major objective of qualitative research is to collect data that can be used to analyze a phenomenon, establishing the parameters participants will need to meet is my first step. The approach taken for this is presented below.

Selection of Participants

Before participants were selected, I sought the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of South Florida. Once approval was granted, using a Participant Recruitment Letter, potential participants were informed of the purpose of the study, rationale for study, and criteria for selection. For this study, I sought to examine the experiences of Black teachers in special education. To collect detailed descriptions that will provide insight into the area of interest, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling provides researchers the best selection of information needed to address research questions (Merriam, 2014), because it is based on gaining insight from the population about whom you want to learn (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the focus of my study is solely regarding the experiences of Black special education teachers, it was important that I was purposeful in selecting participants from whom I can obtain meaningful information. Choosing participants who do not self-identify as Black, teach high incidence disabilities, or who have less than five years of experience in the field as a state-licensed practitioner would hinder the quality of information received for my analysis and will provide no understanding for the purpose of this study.

In addition, I implemented snowball sampling. This strategy allows researchers to locate other potential participants using previously selected and approved collaborators (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using snowball sampling allowed me to gain access to hard-to-find participants

through the social networks of identified participants for the study (Litchman, 2013). Having acquired my own network after five years in special education, I utilized this network to find teachers that may be interested in participating in the study and connected with other teachers who may know someone who would be a good fit for my research. Through my role as a special education teacher and my associations to organizations like the Pinellas Alliance of Black School Educators (PABSE) and the Concerned Organization for Quality Education for Black Students (COQEBS), I attracted participants for this study. Among the participants recruited are individuals whom I am acquainted with from various schools in central Florida, where I have worked extensively throughout the years. The network of Black special education teachers is small; therefore, using established networks allowed me to find a greater pool of participants that were used for this study. After receiving recommendations from participants, I reached out to other potential candidates by email to gauge their interest in participating.

To be selected, participants needed to meet the following basic criteria:

1. Self-identify as Black

2. Teach one of the following high-incidence disabilities (LD, E/BD, & MID)

3. Teach primary, intermediate, or secondary school in a public school

4. Taught consistently for more than five years preferably.

5. Fully licensed teacher in the state of Florida

This basic criterion was needed because it encompasses the demographic information needed for the study. Considering this study focused on the experiences of Black special education teachers, it was essential that I only interviewed people who were Black and teach one of the high-incidence disabilities in special education in the state of Florida's public schools. This study looked at K-12 teachers who have been successful (taught consistently for more than

five years) in special education, and work at the primary (elementary school), intermediate (middle school), secondary (high school) level. Lastly, participants who have taught for more than five years are necessary, because teachers who have taught for more than five years in special education have surpassed the phase during which most teachers enter and leave the field (Goldring et al., 2014).

Once a pool of candidates was established, I extracted participants best suited for this study, based on criteria already aligned above. Considering the need to collect a sample that will provide rich thick descriptions, I used a sample size of five participants, with the goal of acquiring in-depth interviews from three participants. In this study, I used my personal experiences to connect with participants thus making interviews more like a conversation. Because I do not seek to describe the experiences of all Black special education teachers but seek to, instead, provide insight into some of those experiences, this sample size reflects the narrow aim and specificity of the study (Malterud et al., 2016). Factors that were taken into consideration for sample size include: the research goal, the variation of responses, and the generality of possible conclusions (Flick, 2016). Additionally, personal and practical limitations of resources are also key factors to final sample size (Emmel, 2013). For this study, I sought to obtain two participants who have received their certification through traditional methods and two who used alternative routes. Finding participants who have entered special education using both traditional and alternative routes provided insight on how participants perceive the effectiveness of those routes in shaping their persistence. Once participants met criteria for selection, they were informed of interview and confidentiality procedures.

Interviewing

Once IRB approval was obtained (see appendix C), I commenced informed consent and data collection. Poth and Creswell (2017) described this process as an interrelated event of

collecting, reading, reflecting, and describing information used to answer research questions. For this process, the instrument I used to gather data was individual interviews. The use of interviews helped to engage in a dialogue with participants that provided rich and deep data due to its straightforward and direct approach (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Participants for this study were interviewed once for at least 1 hour. Participants had the choice to do an in-person interview or virtual interview via Teams or Zoom. All participants for this study chose to use Teams, therefore I used the recording and live transcribe feature available on the platform. I also used my password protected phone and iPad to record the interview as well. During each interview, I took handwritten notes on points of discussion.

Interviews were semi-structured, because it is a common approach for data collection in qualitative research (Hammersly, 2013). Using semi-structured interviews for this study allowed for "deeper and more meaningful" responses, as opposed to rigid and sparse responses common in structured interviews (Lichtman, 2013, p. 191). Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to focus on the experiences discussed while allowing for emerging topics to be explored. The questions for this interview centered around the queries posed at the onset of this research (refer to appendix A and B for interview questions)

Confidentiality

To maintain participant confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The names of all participants were always protected and were not disclosed during this study. All recordings, transcripts, and other data needed for this study was secured and stored on a device with password protection. On the device, all data and files pertaining to the study was listed under a pseudonym, to keep anonymity. All information collected will only be made available to the researcher and will not be shared with anyone at any point in time.

Data Analysis

As data was collected from participants using interviews, I used the information for data analysis. For this, qualitative research uses an inductive approach; where researchers "begin with data and use the data to gain an understanding of phenomena and interaction" (Litchman, 2013, p. 19). The data collected from the interviews were transcribed by me with the help of the live transcribe feature. The process for transcription requires the researchers to carefully listen to the recordings and capture the words of the interview, for analysis (Stuckey, 2014). I have chosen to transcribe interviews, myself, because it allowed me to become more familiar with the data and help with finding themes during analysis (Bailey, 2008). This stage of research was critical in gaining an understanding of the experiences of Black special education teachers. With qualitative research, how the collected information is examined and interpreted can vary widely, but it is preferred that both the collection of data and analysis are conducted simultaneously (Merriam, 2014). This helps to manage and focus the data while making findings more concise (Merriam, 2009). Thus, I gathered, transcribed, and analyzed to extract meaning from data (Litchman, 2013). Using thematic analysis, I made sense of participant interviews.

CRT Analytic Analysis

For this study, I used a critical lens as an analytic tool. Using previous literature examined during the literature review on the experiences of Black teachers in special education, I looked for emerging themes grounded in the tenets of CRT by reviewing participant transcripts. Additionally, I used theoretical sensitivity and cultural intuition as I looked for themes. These two strategies are used by critical race theorists to analyze data (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As a result of the implementation of these strategies, I used my cultural knowledge to extract meaningful and significant information for analysis and to discover relationships between

different concepts to compose counter-stories (Bernal, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once data was analyzed and compiled, I created a narrative using excerpts from participants' interviews. These narratives were later reported in a storytelling way (e.g., larger exerts) to obtain deep and rich stories.

Trustworthiness & Validity of Research

To maintain credibility, not just in my interpretations of data but throughout this study, I used Guba's (1981) criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. He purports several components: credibility, dependability, and transferability. These standards for trustworthiness helped to ensure the validity of this study and added value to the integrity of my work. To establish credibility, Stahl and King (2020) recommended researchers use triangulation. Triangulation represents the use of multiple methods to collect data (Stahl & King, 2020). For this study, I used the following to triangulate an understanding of my research questions: interview videos, interview transcripts, and my journal entries. Because qualitative research is centered on the researcher's judgment, it is essential that researchers present explanations of the guiding principles for their study, to ensure the integrity of the research (Woods et al., 2016).

Everything from choosing a topic to the approach chosen to present data, holds some manner of subjectivity (Morrow, 2005). On the grounds of this, I acknowledge that my nine years teaching special education in the state of Florida have presented me with many assumptions and biases leading into this study. I hypothesize the school environment plays a significant role in teacher persistence as well as teacher internal motivation and passion for the field. I also assume that current and future policies can assist or hinder the success of Black teachers and increase their representation. To manage my subjectivity, I maintained a self-

reflective journal to record all emerging knowledge and assumptions that I experienced

(Morrow, 2005). I used this journal to reflect and examine my conduct, thoughts, and

assumptions, when conducting interviews and data analysis throughout this study.

Systematically maintaining reflexivity throughout a study is an integral component of

ethical research (Sultana, 2007). It is a way to analytically account for the way in which

knowledge is constructed (Malterud, 2001). I have chosen to also include my positionality to

justify my interpretations of data to readers. In addition, establishing dependability of this data

also plays a critical role. Dependability serves as a function for reliability. It is often used to refer

to the stability of data over time (Polit & Beck, 2012, p. 492). A practice implemented by

researchers to increase reliability is the use of an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). An audit

trail presents readers the process used to collect, examine, and interpret data (Guba, 1981). For

this study, my audit trail is reflected in the detailed descriptions of steps taken to conduct this

study. My meticulous attention to presenting full descriptions throughout this study will enhance

the reliability of the findings of this research.

The third component of credibility is transferability. Transferability translates to the ability

of a study to be applicable to other settings and contexts (Polit & Beck, 2012, p. 506). Although

the nature of qualitative research does not seek generalizability, the condition of transferability

finds similarities applicable to other phenomena (Stahl & King, 2020). It is recommended that

researchers provide rich, detailed descriptions of a study's setting, participants, context, and

analysis so other researchers may find connections to a study (Connelly, 2016). For this study,

transferability was achieved in the thick descriptions of participants' characteristics, setting, and

the description of the analysis process.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Black special education teachers teaching high-incidence disabilities in Florida public schools. In this chapter, an outline of the methods and procedures for this study was given. The section started with an iteration of the purpose of this study and then, provided the theoretical perspectives guiding the methods. The qualitative methodology, selection of participants, and method for data collection and analysis were given. The chapter ended with an explanation of researcher positionality and reflexivity.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black special education instructors who have taught for more than five years in public schools with students identified as high-incidence disabilities. This study sought to understand the influence of leadership, policies, and other factors on the persistence of Black special education teachers. To accomplish this purpose, the following research questions were used to guide this study:

    a. What are the lived experiences of Black special education teachers?

        i. What do Black special education teachers view as influential to their

          persistence in continuing in their positions?

        ii. How do Black special education teachers maneuver around common

          barriers in special education?

In this chapter, I present the findings from the five participants. As I have mentioned, I am using CRT narratives because it serves as a tool to document the ways in rich Black special education teachers are affected by race and racism (Lynn & Dixson, 2022). The following is based on the transcripts from 5 interviews. The narrative I share below is based on themes identified within participant interviews: Theme 1: The role of administration on the Black special education (SPED) teachers experience. Theme 2: The role of policies on the Black SPED experience. Theme 3: The role of race on the Black SPED experience. Results indicate, Black SPED teachers confront enormous difficulties. Along with the usual pressures that special education teachers encounter, Black special education teachers also indicate there is a lack of understanding among educators, leaders, and policy makers, which is made worse by racism's

overt and covert effects. To overcome these challenges, Black special education teachers leverage their strong relationships with peers to get through these obstacles and find solutions to difficult problems.

Research Participants

The five individuals who took part in this study all self-identify as Black public school special education teachers who teach students with high-incidence disabilities at a primary, intermediate, or secondary school in Florida. The average number of years taught between the five participants is 16 years.

Table 1.1 Summary of participant breakdown.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Years Taught	Certifications	Alternative V. Traditional	Grade Level
Diane	Female	50-55	20	English, ESOL, ESE, & Reading	Traditional	Intermediate
Waverly	Female	40-45	14	Reading, Elm. Education, ESOL, & ESE	Traditional	Secondary
Melvin	Male	45-50	10	ESE	Alternative	Secondary
Wallace	Male	45-50	19	ESOL & ESE	Traditional	Primary
Eric	Male	50-55	20	Reading, ASD, & ESE	Alternative	Secondary

Participant Descriptions

Diane. Diane is a Black teacher who has been teaching in special education for twenty

years. She holds a certification in English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), ESE, Reading, and English 5th-9th grade. During her time in education, Diane has taught at two schools. The first was a fundamental school, where she started as a paraprofessional and later worked her way up to being a teacher. Diane worked at this school for six years before transferring to her current school. Now Diane works at a Title 1 magnet middle school in an urban area. In this school, she teaches English Language Arts, Reading, Social Skills, and two units of Unique Skills. She also provides facilitation support for an English Honors class. The school is composed of roughly 78% minority population, with most students qualifying for a free or reduced lunch. According to Florida's Standards Assessment (FSA) and End of Course (EOC) subject assessments, most students at this school perform below math and reading proficiency. When asked what her motivation for entering special education, Diane explained that while working as a paraprofessional in an emotionally handicapped class, she taught three students who were low readers how to read. Helping these students to read was so satisfying that she enrolled in a postsecondary licensure program immediately afterwards. After many years in special education, Diane reports she often gets complimented for the great work she does. Although her time in special education has not been smooth, the motivation of a friend from church has encouraged Diane to persist in special education. She contributes the success of her students as the most rewarding part of her job and the reason to continue to do what she does.

Waverly. Waverly is a Black female teacher who has been working in special education for fourteen years. She holds a certification in Reading, ESE, Elementary Education K-6, and ESOL. Like Diane, Waverly has only worked at two schools during her career. Her first school was also the school where she interned. According to Waverly, her first school played a pivotal role in her success in special education. During her time at her first school, she recalls all the support she

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received from the teachers there. This support would later equip Waverly with the tools to teach at her current school, Kings High School, for thirteen years. Like Diane, Waverly also works at a Title 1 magnet school in an urban area. However, Waverly works at a high school that boasts a population of around 1,140 students. Of that population, approximately 72% of the students are minority students, and more than half of the students attending this school receive free or reduced lunch. This school also encompasses a high minority population with staff.

Self-described as someone who is standoffish and does not voice concerns with administration, Waverly has navigated her career in special education by relying on the support and help of other teachers. In the belief that it is her responsibility to get things done, Waverly does not need nor look for the support of her administration when confronting obstacles. First, entering special education following a recommendation from her college adviser, Waverly has stayed in special education because she is familiar and comfortable with everything the job entails. Her students' success motivates her to persevere.

Melvin. Melvin is a Black male teacher who has worked in special education for ten years. Like Waverly, Melvin also teaches at "Kings High School." Currently, Melvin holds a certification in ESE K-12. Melvin started his career as a football player for five years. After leaving the profession, Melvin took an alternative route to education and began substituting while he worked to get his teaching certification. Several factors inspired his decision to be a special education teacher. His mom, who was an educator, his time volunteering in special education classes, and his own experiences as a student with a learning disability. Together, these experiences shaped his passion for special education. However, he cites his background in sports as the key to navigating the challenges associated with the position. In his interview, he explained as a former athlete, coaches constantly critiqued his work. Because of this, he was use

to making frequent adjustments to adapt to the situation. Having had this experience, Melvin uses this work ethic as a special education teacher. He believes if he encounters any problems in his position, it is his responsibility to find a solution. Like Waverly, Melvin does not seek the help nor the support of his administration. He has adapted to ebbs and flows of special education by trying things himself or asking other teachers for help. Melvin has stayed in special education because he believes it is his purpose in life. He enjoys working with his kids and seeing former students do well years later. For Melvin, this motivates him to stay and continue working in special education.

    Wallace. Wallace is a Black male teacher who has worked in special education for nineteen years. He holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in special education. Wallace is certified in ESOL, ESE, and is currently working on a certification for autism. Wallace has worked with students of all grade levels and disabilities throughout his career. Currently, Wallace teaches at a Title I elementary school as the school's resource teacher. As the resource teacher, he provides support for ELA and math. His school has a predominantly minority population, with over 50% of the students being Hispanic and over 30% identifying as Black. The demographics of the students also reflect the staff population. Out of all participants, Wallace is the one teacher that has moved the most. He has taught at fifteen schools in three different states. First working in his small town in rural Florida. Wallace has worked in Florida, Georgia, and California. When asked why so many schools, Wallace explained the county he taught in, he possessed the only special education certification within the county thus, he was required to service several schools. Throughout his career in special education, Wallace has not wavered in his love for it. His interest and passion for special education results from his younger sister with Down syndrome. As her older brother, he has played a critical role in helping raise

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her. For Wallace, special education is part of who he is and what his life represents. He's invested in special education. Like all the teachers in this study, the reward of seeing his students succeed keeps him motivated.

Eric. Finally, Eric is a Black male teacher who has taught in special education for twenty years. Eric holds a certification in Reading, ESE, and autism. Like Melvin, Eric took an alternative route to education. Having spent the early years of his career working at a credit card company, Eric never imagined a career in education. But after struggling to find a new job and receiving a letter seeking students interested in teaching. Eric enrolled in an education program and shortly afterwards began teaching. Like most participants in this study, Eric has only worked at two schools. His first school was a Middle School with a huge minority population. In his interview, Eric spoke of his deep admiration for this school. During his interview, he stated, "I love Middlebrook because there were so many black teachers. I see all these teachers around and I say I'm home." Eric would spend six years at his first school before leaving for his current school of fourteen years. Currently, Eric is working at a Title I magnet high school. Unlike most teachers in this study, Eric does not work at a predominantly Black school. His school averages around 86% White demographic for teachers and staff. Although Eric initially wanted to work at a school that had a large Black faculty and student population, Eric has stayed at his current school because of the hands-off approach exhibited by the administration. Like all teachers in this study, working with students is the most rewarding aspect of his career and is the reason he stays.

Participant Stories

Participants of this study shared many similar views and experiences with issues of policy, race, and leadership in their stories. Participants differed, however, in which experiences were

relevant to them. In the following sections, I describe participant stories in detail. These stories are organized into three sections that emerged from participant interviews policy, race, and leadership.

The Role of Administration on the Black Special Education Teachers Experience

The role of administration on Black teacher's experiences in education is one that participants of this study expressed mixed views on. Some participants (Diane, Waverly, and Ernest) preferred an absent and hands-off administrator; While Ernest preferred an administrator who was both knowledgeable and active in the events that took place in the class. From the interviews of the participants, four types of administrators emerged: the absent administrator, the uninformed, the bully, and the ideal administrator. The following presents the experiences of Black special education teachers in relation to their school administrators.

At the outset of their interviews, most participants described their current relationship with their school administrator favorably. Using words like "good, supportive, and fine" to describe their relationship. Circumstances for these perspectives range from "they don't bother me" to "they're hands-on." But when participants were asked to provide stories of their administration over the years, this is when participant responses deviated. For many, their experiences with leadership throughout their tenure fell between ineffective, non-supportive, and uninformed. Only one participant, Eric, ever described a supportive and kind administrator. According to Eric, he had been blessed to have good administrators over the years. He would tell his interns "Listen y'all, if you are lucky enough to get to a school where you have an administration that will support you and will tell you that and actually mean it, I say you're lucky because, for a majority of teachers, it doesn't happen." For Eric, this was the biggest reason he had not left his school. Throughout his career, Eric explained that he had experienced several great

administrators. The two administrators mentioned by Eric were his current administrator, Alfred, whose wife was a special education teacher. This made Alfred more sympathetic and aware of the needs of special education teachers; and a former administrator at his first school, who had built such a warm community within the school, teachers and administrators often dined out together after work.

Based on participant stories, Eric's experience is the exception. No other participants spoke of their experiences in a similar fashion. Instead, the descriptions that were given were characterized as "uninformed, bullies, and unsupportive". During participant interviews, participants described the uninformed administrator as the administrator who does not understand special education. This type of administrator is discussed in the interview with Eric. In his interview, he describes a situation where his school administrator would use his and other ESE classrooms as a dumping ground for disruptive students. That situation as told

> Okay we're gonna have a buddy system where you can have a kid go down to another teacher's room when they needed a break. Little did I know he [the principal] told everybody send them down to Eric's room. So, I had kids just popping up at the door…They dumped them kids, I mean talk about how bad it's gotten, they would just throw kids in our classroom. Hey, there was a fight down there, okay, put one in Eric's classroom. You know because they have extra space down there. They don't have the volume of kids that every other teacher has. So, this was for him a social experiment. You know, they need to know how fortunate they are not to be like those kids [ESE kids], they need to know how fortunate they are to be in regular classes. So, send them down there so they can see.

Eric would also later tell me this same administrator would say, "I'm concerned about the number of ESE students on my campus. They're going against the school grade. I need those numbers as low as possible."

During Eric's interview, he explained these comments and beliefs had occurred the entire time this administrator stayed at the school. For Eric, this created a challenging environment to teach, but it did not cause him to leave. Unfortunately, the same can not be said for Wallace, who left his school of six years after experiencing what he described as a bullying situation with his administrator. In his interview, Wallace described a situation where his administrator constantly targeted him and made his job a living hell. As Wallace put it,

> There are administrators who career bully you. You know this is your career,
>
> and once your career is your livelihood, this is not a job. This is my career.
>
> This is how I support my family. This is how I live. This is what support me.
>
> This is my contribution to society.

Wallace regarded his career as one of the most valuable aspects of his life. It did not sit well with him that administrators held so much power over his career.

But Wallace is not the only participant who has experienced what he describes as bullying from his administrator. During Diane's interview, she too described a situation where her administrator would make things challenging for her. Her situation is as follows:

> I'm gonna say this, there was an incident a few years ago here. With a student
>
> and like I said, they don't get to know my students, so they don't know how to
>
> react when they do things. So, I had a student that got upset and decided he was
>
> gonna walk off campus. Instead of them going after him. The administrator was
>
> just kind of like sitting there, smiling and smirking. And I'm looking like, are

you gonna do anything or is anybody gonna get this child because we're out

here on 16th street and anybody could easily get hit.

Then she went on to explain how

So, after I saw that nobody was gonna do anything and she kept smiling, I just

decided to call, you know, like in a calm voice and tell him who I was because

he was clearly upset. And I asked him to turn around and meet me halfway

back and he did that. So, when we got into the school. I didn't know they had

called his mom. So, when I came back in she [the principal] started yelling at

me in front of everyone.

In this situation, Diane took the initiative to address a student who was upset, but instead of

receiving praise for helping her administrator with an angry student she was berated. This was

very embarrassing for Diane.

According to Diane, this had not been the first time her administrator had acted in such a

way toward her. For Diane, this situation was extremely embarrassing and demeaning. However,

she did not leave her school because of it. The harassment of teachers by school administrators

makes teaching difficult, and fortunately, only Wallace and Dillard described dealing with this

type of administrator in their interviews. Instead of all the descriptions discussed during

participant interviews, unsupportive traits were the most prevalent. Wallace, Eric, and Dillard

had all shared stories of the lack of support received from their administration over the years.

Their administration mostly stayed away from their classes. Diane stated, "they don't really come

to my classroom unless they need a student, and most of the time they still don't come to the

classroom." Waverly similarly declared the absence of her administration in her classroom. Even

Eric had experienced a lack of support and acknowledgment from his administrator. In his

interview, he indicated that "my principal was not supportive, she wouldn't even look at you." The lack of support experienced by participants mostly had little impact on their day-to-day routines however, for Wallace, this was not true. For Wallace, his administration's lack of support impacted not only his teaching but also his performance evaluations. In his interview, he stated,

> Several years when I was at Brooksville High school, I felt like I wasn't supported as a special education teacher, based off of poor leadership…. Why do I need to wait weeks to find out what you observe? Tell me what you see now. What do I need to do right now so that when I come back in three months, this situation ain't bigger or worse. Don't let me continue my approach for three months and then at the end of the year you say "oh you could have been much better. You need to improve on that."

In explaining how Wallace was unsupported as a teacher he states his frustrations with waiting to get feedback from administration after observations. For Wallace, administrators should help their teachers be successful by providing them with input on how they can be better.

In this situation, Wallace voiced his concern to an administrator who only critiqued his performance but could not provide him with tools to do better. Instead, Wallace would not receive feedback on his performance until the end of the year. This would frustrate Wallace because he wanted his administrator to tell him what ways he needed to improve and how to address that improvement. Instead, his administrator only told him what he had done wrong at the end of the year and offered no opportunities for improvement. This, for any teacher, would be extremely frustrating. However, for special education teachers, the inability of school administrators to provide strategies for their work while evaluating their performance can hinder

persistence.

The Role of Policies on the Black Special Education Teacher Experience

The impact of policies on the experiences of Black teachers in special education varied. For most participants case management is the biggest stressor of the job. Participants described the hassle of managing large caseloads and writing IEPs. Some even mentioned the impact of case management on their ability to teach. While case management was found to be the most prominent strain for Black special education teachers in this study, participants also identified teacher evaluations as an area of contention. The following presents participant experiences with policies, specifically policies related to teacher evaluations and case management.

The first aspect of policies that emerged as a point of contention for participants in this study is teacher evaluations. All participants in this study felt the current evaluative system was designed with the intent of evaluating general education teachers and not necessarily special education teachers. At the time of this interview all participants worked in a county that used the Marzano Focused Teacher Evaluation Model. Common among participants were statements like the one from Eric stating that "those evaluation tools are not anything meant for us [special education teachers], they need to take into consideration the things that we go through, the different behaviors we deal with as well as the different levels our kids are on." Participants believed that the evaluation policy needed to be more explicitly relevant to the work of special education teachers. Special education teachers' work is more extensive and different from other teachers. These teachers work with a population performing below standards and with more needs. Therefore, the frustrations shared regarding teacher evaluations are reasonable. Waverly during her interview stated,

> I don't feel like that [the current evaluation practice] should evaluate your

effectiveness as a teacher because you know it's geared more towards general

education because honestly with special education like reviewing critical

content for some students int he ESE population could just be remembering

what the first letter of their name starts with. That could be something critical.

Whereas they [administration] don't really have experience with a lot of the

different population in ESE. They might not think that is something critical.

A major reason Waverly is frustrated in this situation is due to her belief that the elements that she is evaluated on are designed for general education teachers and not for special education teachers. Also, Waverly believes that administrators who evaluate her effectiveness are not experienced in working in special education and may not understand the nuances of teaching students with special needs.

All participants in this study shared Waverly's frustration regarding teacher evaluations. They all found the current evaluation tool inadequate for their students and their work. Additionally, the fact that most administrators did not at any point work in special education also left a certain amount of suspicion. In Diane's interview, she complained about the requirement of rigor for her students. She explained, "my kids are barely writing a paragraph, but you're expecting me to have them [ESE students] write in three paragraphs." Diane's frustration for rigor was an apparent complaint she had with her administrator, who, when evaluating her performance, had an unrealistic expectation for her students. The inability of administration to understand the plight of special education teachers shows why during Wallace's interview he posed this question: "How can you [administration] do a formal evaluation if you aren't equipped with the understanding and the skill set? I could use my accommodations and you not even see them. You don't see every accommodation."

For the participants of this study, the current evaluative policy was a tool meant for others. Yet, it was being used to evaluate special education teachers. Although most participants did not assume the evaluation system to be a direct attack on special education teachers, one participant Eric, had this to say:

> You know I have my little theories on that. I think they make them [evaluation
>
> systems] as complicated as possible simply because they want people to not do
>
> as well… They make them as hard as they can for teachers to get a decent
>
> grade. I think we need to let the ESE teachers have a seat at the table because
>
> we know what tools we use. You need ESE to come up with their own
>
> evaluation tool.

Eric is frustrated with current evaluative practice. He believes special education teachers need to have a say in how they are evaluated because only they know what they do. Developing an evaluation tool specifically for ESE teachers seemed to be a common theme among participant stories. The study participants expressed frustration with a variety of issues, but the biggest threat to participant persistence is the use of a grading instrument that hinders Black special education teachers from receiving high marks in their evaluations.

Apart from Eric and Wallace, participants discussed the challenges of case management, including the difficulty of managing large caseloads. They also discussed the time it takes away from other responsibilities. For Diane, she spends an additional ten hours outside of work almost every week to complete students individualized education plans. During her interview, Diane admitted when she first started writing IEPs; she did not know what she was doing. She explained during her first years of teaching; she struggled to write IEPs because she had not learned how to do so in school or on her internship. She recalled a time,

I think it was two years ago, no three years ago, there was only two ESE

teacher here. We had to manage everything. We didn't have a VE

specialist……That was a lot for both of us to manage and teach classes. It was

so time consuming it really did take away from a lot. The time I was using to

write IEPs, I could have been using to come up with better lesson plans.

During this situation, Diane is describing one of the most challenging times she has had teaching

and managing a caseload. Due to all the students, Diane felt she had not prepared quality lessons

for her students.

Diane's recognition of her focus on case management over her instruction was also

emphasized during Melvin' interview. He too struggled to balance his teaching and case

management obligations.

I mean it's a juggling act when you have IEPs. You have to be organized. You

gotta know your dates and you have to plan ahead. At the same time, you still

have to teach…I know something has to give and usually that's the content.

You may not focus on the content that you're supposed to be teaching because

this IEP needs to be completed because it's a legal document. The IEP comes

first, and then everything else is secondary.

In this situation Melvin explains that to manage all the demands that come with being a special

education teacher he puts completing IEPs first.

Both Melvin's and Diane's experiences with case management suggest the development of

IEPs are impacting the quality of instruction given by special education teachers. Both teachers

admit writing IEPs takes away from the time they could use to create better lesson plans.

However, they also recognize the importance of completing IEPs. This is one aspect of case

management that all participants of the study could agree on. However, Waverly was the only participant who would go into detail about how she managed large caseloads. During her interview, she states,

> I know this isn't the best strategy, but the students that I know, I see the most. I kind of focus on them a little bit more than the other students. Which I know isn't fair because I should be seeing all of them as frequently as I can, but having to teach several different subjects, then go in and support other class, then case manage students, then hold meetings, and progress monitor student goals is a lot of roles for one person to do. Sometimes IEPs can take several hours….. Some students, you don't get very helpful information back from their teachers. So, then you have to go and dig and look for stuff and try to figure out where there struggling and then even sometimes, you'll ask teachers, you know what areas is the student struggling and they still don't give you any information. So, it just puts a little more stress on me.

In this context, Waverly shares her experience of writing an Individualized Education Program (IEP). As she explains, she sometimes makes sacrifices to get the job done.

The challenges of case management is a task that all participants must comply with. In the interviews with Melvin, Diane, and Waverly, this challenge is a constant conflict as a special education teacher. But this was not the case for all participants. Both Wallace and Eric expressed no challenges with case management. Wallace, recalling the earlier days of writing IEPs, discussed having to write out IEPs on typewriter. Thus, the advancements in writing IEPs made case management easy for him. For Eric, he felt there was no need to complain about the work involved in case management. He knew about the challenges peers at other schools faced, and he

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was pleased with the small caseloads he had been given at his school. Eric had no problems writing IEPs. In fact, the district had used his IEP as a model example of what IEPs should look like. For Eric, he was better than anyone at his school.

> I'm very good at what I do, and I think I do it better than anybody around me.
>
> As a matter of fact, I know I do it better than anybody around me. As far as
>
> I'm concerned, I'm better than anybody in this building.

Eric expresses how he perceives his performance as "better" in comparison to his peers.

Eric's skill at writing IEPs provided him with confidence that many other participants in this study did not possess. He not only knew how to manage the work that came with writing IEPs, but he excelled at it. It is perhaps for this reason that he was so confused when he was passed over for a promotion at work. During Eric's interview, he explained his discontent and frustrations with the system for rewarding those that did not deserve it. He stated,

> We gonna leave his black ass in the classroom where he can continue to write
>
> the IEPs, but we gonna give it to the people that we can't stand that should have
>
> been fired multiple times over. We're gonna give them a new position. I said,
>
> boy, you gotta love the way the system works.

For Eric, this experience showed him his place was in the class. Although very competent and certainly deserving of a promotion, Eric believed because he was a Black man, they would always pass him over. To continue the discussion on race, the following section presents participant experiences with race and race-based issues at work.

The Role of Race on the Black Special Education Teacher Experience

All participants described instances of racism and race-based issues in their interviews. These issues are organized around stereotypes and microaggressions. For the participants in this

study, the issues concerning race were not only directed at teachers but also at their students. Therefore, instances of racism toward students are included to show the role of these instances in the experiences of Black teachers in special education. To do this, the following section presents how Black special education teachers describe their experiences with racism and race-based issues in their roles.

For most of the participants in this study they shared personal stories of racism and race-based issues in education. Waverly and Melvin, two teachers at the same school, had been fortunate not to report any encounters with personal attacks of racism. Instead, both shared instances of racial stereotypes aimed at others. Due to Waverly's aversion to interacting with other people and her employment at racially diverse schools, she believed she had escaped most negative racial experiences. The only instances when she had experienced racial biases was when it was directed at Black students and parents.

Common amongst participants were stories of having heard or witnessed racial biases. For Eric, this came from a training conducted at his school. In his interview, he explained while attending a session on equity, Eric was confronted with the realities of how White teachers really felt about Black students and parents at his school. In response to the cause for the learning and graduation gap among Black students, Eric quoted teachers saying, "their families don't do this, their families don't do that, and if their parents were better parents, they would do this..." These comments although very offensive to Eric were perceived by the White teachers at his school as acceptable explanations for the gap between Black and White students. In this situation, Eric also reported that the school was not allowed to discuss teacher responses and possibly correct the fallacies of such comments.

While this situation illustrates racial stereotypes often said within today's schools, not all

comments go unaddressed. Both Wallace and Melvin discussed not only hearing racial stereotypes but also addressing them when they occurred. In Wallace's case, having heard his Varying Exceptionalities (VE) Specialist complain about a parent's absence from a meeting, Wallace chose to provide an alternative perspective for the situation. He stated,

That is a moment where I felt like, you know your situation is different. You are not everybody. You haven't experienced what we [Black people] have experienced. Your empathy and sympathy for Blacks can create a negative stereotype as well. You have to understand this woman has to work, she got other kids.

In this situation Wallace felt it necessary to not only challenge the perspective of his school's VE specialist but also make it clear the impact of those beliefs in shaping negative stereotypes for Black parents. This is also the case for Melvin, who while during a professional development workshop, discussed having to educate a White teacher who struggled to relate to minority parents. Unfortunately, this situation seems to be one that is not abnormal. The stereotypes experienced by participants in this study seem to be an unintended reality working as a Black special education teacher. Sadly, racial stereotypes are not where racism and race-based issues stop for Black special education teachers. Microaggressions are equally concerning for Black special education teachers.

For participants Diane, Wallace, and Eric, this was something they all encountered, but for Eric, a fervent believer of W. E. B. Du Bois "Double Consciousness." The inequalities and biases of racism were for him, a common experience for all Black professionals in the workplace. Therefore, Eric's experiences with race did not challenge his persistence, but made him more socially aware of the manifestations of them. Because of this, Eric shared the most stories about race in his interview. Eric had often explored or engaged in conversations with a

focus on race in education. Through his investigation, Eric discovered his school imposed double standards when disciplining Black and White students. Additionally, Eric also discovered the challenges school principals faced hiring an excess of Black teachers. This assumption was based on a conversation he had overheard. Describing the context for that conversation, Eric explained he had heard his then principal Jerry tell the teacher next door,

> I take so much shit from the district for hiring a lot of Black teachers. They [the district] call me down there and ask how many Black teachers y'all got out there. And I tell them, listen, I hire black teachers because I need somebody to work with these young Black males. That's the concern out here. Those are the teachers I don't have to worry about. Their classrooms are in order. If there is an issue, they find a way to deal with it.

For Eric, hearing the backlash his school administrator received for hiring Black teachers confirmed to him that the district did not want schools with predominantly Black teachers.

This conversation for Eric provided him with what he believes are the unspoken truths about education. This also affirmed his initially interest to choose a school based on the demographics of the teachers. This was the case when Eric chose the first school that he would work at. During his interview, Eric discussed the joy it brought working at a racially diverse school.

> When I stepped in there I said, oh my goodness, I love Middle Brooke because there were so many Black teachers. I mean, opposed to, you know, Wellington, which of course, it was none of us [Black teachers] up there. But when I went to Middle Brooke and I saw all these teachers who look like me around, I said I'm home. I was happy at Middle Brooke.

Although it is clear, Eric enjoyed the diversity found at Middle Brook; currently the school he works at has fewer Black students.

When discussing the diversity at Eric's current school, he reports during the eleven years he has been at his school there have been at most four Black teachers working there at any one moment. He also mentioned the school possessed a mentality for "one black person out, one black person in." This mentality described by Eric shared some similarities with Diane's experiences. Out of all the participants that shared their experiences with race, Diane was the only participant that discussed how these experiences made her feel. When describing how she felt, Diane had this to say:

> I feel like now being Black, I don't get treated like the others [White teachers]. When I first started working here, it was a lot of Blacks working here, but now there's not. I'm not sure if there's ten of us. Administration pushes them away. They tell them they can't come back, so you know some just walk out on their own…..My administrator, he caterers to the White versus Blacks. He comes down harder on us [Black teachers] than them [White teachers]. Even like if we see each other, we try to stand and talk but you know of course you can't stand too long so you gotta keep it moving, but it's okay for them [White teachers] to stand and do whatever they want.

This double standard in education has now been discussed for both Black students, but also for Black teachers. While seeing and experiencing these instances can be extremely frustrating, Diane never mentioned confronting any racially motivated situations while at work. Both Eric and Wallace had done so.

In Eric's situation, he had confronted as he described an "overtly aggressive" White teacher

who seemed to take issue with Eric using the copier. To address this teacher, Eric proclaimed he went up to the teacher and said,

> Do we have a problem? Because I don't know you and you certainly can't
> know me. So, what is the problem? Is it my skin color? I'm here to earn a
> paycheck, just like you're here to earn a paycheck. I'm here to do a job just like
> you're here to do the job and after that job is over, I wanna go home and go
> back to mine.

In this situation, Eric questions a coworker who has been consistently aggressive with him. In this conversation he attempts to find out the cause for the hostility. During this conversation, Eric felt it necessary to address the constant aggression received from the White teacher. He reported following this conversation he had no more issues with that teacher.

Similarly, Wallace would do the same in a situation he encountered while at work. Wallace explained he had just started a new teaching position when he encountered a problem with a White paraprofessional in the class. She did not want to work under a Black teacher and did not like the changes he was making in the class. Wallace reported,

> She had a lot of Southern habits. She was, in my opinion, borderline racist.
> You know, Black people are beneath me and especially the ones who are in
> special education. It's like oh look at my pet….So we had a Country Club in
> my county. It still might be there, I don't know, but at this Country Club there
> were no Black members to this Country Club. I know this because I'm from
> this county. Black people didn't play golf because they had nowhere to play
> golf and because this Country Club was Whites only and where I'm from that
> has always existed. So, what she [the White paraprofessional] would do is

every Wednesday she would take those classes to the golf club and mind you,

they had this little pick them up machine that would just roll over the balls and

pick up the balls. However, this was an activity that she felt like all the kids

enjoyed and I was like, what is it that they are learning?

Wallace went onto explain how appalled he was with the activity that he told his paraprofessional,

Then I told her we ain't going to this golf course no more so you either ride with

it or you don't. Naturally this upset her, and all this other stuff and I understood

it like this. That's how you were raised, you from this county and I know where

you are from, and I know what your daddy taught you because your daddy

went to school with my daddy. They graduated in the same class, and when I

asked my dad about your family, he was like, boy, them was some racist White

folks back in the day.

In this situation, Wallace explains one of his early teaching experiences. He mentions how he felt

his paraprofessional was racist and made Black students perform meaningless tasks. Wallace

also provides context to the ways of the town and why the paraprofessional may have believed

the activity was suitable for the Black students.

Because Wallace had worked in his small hometown in the panhandle of Florida, his

experiences with racism seem to be deeply rooted in the ways of an old town. Not only did he

experience a White paraprofessional not wanting to work under him while teaching, but he has

also had a White student removed from his class once the parent discovered he was Black.

Experiences like this are not only frustrating but are not uncommon. For the participants of this

study, workplace microaggressions were common experiences for Diane, Wallace, and Eric.

While Waverly and Melvin never described having experienced microaggressions in the

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workplace, I believe it is important to note these two worked at a school with a diverse staff. However, for Diane, Wallace, and Eric, their work in education always seemed to remind them of their race. Whether it was confronting stereotypes or dealing with microaggressions in the workplace, race, and race-based issues were matters impacting their persistence.

Conclusion

This chapter presented data collected through semi-structured interviews with five participants. My opening paragraph reiterates the study's purpose. I then provided demographic information for each participant. The sex, age range, years taught, certifications, grade level, and route to education are included. In addition to the demographic information for each participant, I also provided background information for each participant.

Using thematic analysis, three themes emerged from participant transcriptions. These themes include the role of administration on the Black special education teachers experience; the role of policies on the Black special education teachers experience; and the role of race on the Black SPED experience. In this chapter, I use themes to organize participant data. From this process, it is evident that Black SPED teachers experience many challenges while teaching. Most participants described many of the same experiences cited in the literature review. Despite this, all participants remained steadfast in their decision to remain special education teachers.

To explore the causes of this and to expand upon the data, in the following chapter, I discuss the findings of the data. I also discuss how my findings align with the theoretical framework. I provide a discussion of the initial research questions posed at the start of the study and recommendations for school leaders and policymakers. I end with a personal reflection.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Historically, White teachers have dominated the demographics for special education teachers (Tyler, Yzquierdo, Lopez-Reyna, & Flippin, 2004). In fact, according to the United States Census Bureau (2019), Black teachers serve less than 10% of the exceptional education workforce, while White teachers make up roughly 82% of both the general and special education population (Billingsley, Bettini, & Williams, 2019). Current trends indicate Black students are often misidentified for special education, placed in more restrictive settings, and receive harsher disciplinary actions (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). This significant disproportionality is attributed to a lack of understanding of the cultural differences shared between teachers and students (Denver et al., 2016; Jordan, 2005; Valls, 2009). With White teachers representing more than half the population in special education at roughly 82%, an increase in racial representation is needed (Billingsley et al., 2019). However, because of the absence of an investigation into the experiences of Black special education teachers, efforts to increase representation have been unsuccessful.

Therefore, in this study, I sought to explore the experiences of successful Black teachers in special education who work with students with high-incidence disabilities. I sought these experiences to explore the role of leadership, policies, and race on the experiences of Black special education teachers. This was done in hopes to expand upon the literature, magnify the experience of Black special education teachers, and provide information that can be used to recruit and maintain Black special education teachers. To accomplish this, the primary questions guiding this study were:

a. What are the lived experiences of Black special education teachers?

      i. What do Black special education teachers view as influential to their

        persistence in continuing in their positions?

      ii. How do Black special education teachers maneuver around common barriers

        in special education?

To present the results of this study, this closing chapter will discuss the findings of this study. Additionally, this chapter will present the alignment of findings to the theoretical framework and recommendations for policymakers and school leaders, as well as a personal reflection.

Discussion of the Findings

In this study, participant stories centered around three themes: race, policy, and leadership. In this section, I will discuss the findings and explain how these themes align with the current literature and the theoretical framework used for this study.

The first theme participants spoke at lengths about was the role of race. All participants experienced instances of race-based stressors in their roles. This was more prevalent among male participants, as they reported more instances of microaggressions and stereotypes. Most of the men in this study believed their race played a role in having been regulated as the school's enforcer for punishment. This also led to common stereotypes by other coworkers who would frequently mistake them for the school's physical education (PE) teacher or behavior specialist. Wallace recalled that during the beginning of the school year, he would often have the same conversation with new teachers. "Oh hey, how you doing? I'm alright. What's your name? Mr. Wallace. Oh, you teach PE, you know because I'm a tall Black man." These experiences described by male participants are consistent with the literature, which reports Black male

teachers are often regulated to the role of school disciplinarian (Pabon, 2016). These experiences also support the theoretical framework that asserts "racism and racial subordination" are common occurrences in the everyday experiences of people of color (Lynn & Dixon, 2013, p. 18).

In addition to microaggressions and stereotypes, participants often described a double standard for both Black teachers and students. Participants described having witnessed or being a victim of the double standard. Diane specifically stated during her interview "Being Black, I don't get treated like the others [White teachers]." When asked to elaborate, she expressed the way she is talked to by others and the lack of recognition for doing something good is always different from her peers. Diane stated, "like if they celebrate somebody doing good, when do I get the notice that I'm doing something good?" Participants discussed the double standard many teachers and administrators held for Black students. In an interview with Eric, he asserted this double standard occurs "every day, every hour, every class period where a White student curses the teacher out, so Jonathan gets one-period suspension, but Willie gets a one-day suspension." White domination and Black subordination support CRT claim that the permanence of racism is engrained in the fabric of education and American society.

Lastly, all the participants shared preferring to work in schools with a population similar to that of their own identity. At the time of the interviews, four of the five teachers were working in schools with a high minority population. This preference shared by the participants in this study is supported by the literature as, high-minority and urban schools have been found to be a preference for many Black teachers (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2016; Pabon, 2016). This was most evident in the response of Eric, who when choosing between two school offers, had selected his first school based on its diversity. In his interview, he stated, "people didn't realize when I was at Brooksville I was happy because when I walked through that door I

see all these Black teachers around and I say I'm home."

The second theme common in participant responses focused on the role of administration on Black special education teacher's experiences. When participants were asked to describe their relationship with their current administrator, all participants reported a supportive relationship with their school leadership. However, when asked to describe their experiences with their administrators over the years, participants explained situations in which they described their administration as being either uniformed, absent, a bully, or the ideal administrator. As a whole, the experiences of participants with their school administrators demonstrates the many manifestations of school leaders today.

For some participants they described their school administration as being uninformed.Best described by Eric, his school administrator constantly used the ESE classrooms as a dumping ground for behavior students. According to Eric, "they would just throw kids in our classroom." The lack of awareness displayed by this administrator lends credence to the lack of awareness shown by many administrators on how to appropriately support their special education teachers (Hester et al., 2020). For some participants, a lack of awareness can lead to what Wallace described as bullying behavior. According to Wallace, "there are administrators who career bully you." During his interview, Wallace discussed the constant bullying he received from his school administrator and how as a result, he decided to leave the school he had worked six years at.

 Additionally, the absent administrator described by Diane and others was the school leader who had nothing to do with ESE. As stated in Diane's interview, "they just don't come in and see what we do and how we do it." Diane and others would all report the absent presence of administration over the years in their classes. In many ways these descriptions given by participants characterize an unsupportive administration. This lack of support described by

participants is consistent with much literature that asserts Black teachers experience little support from their school administrators (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016). But out of all the administrators referenced by participants, the fourth and last administrator described as being the most supportive of administrators was only described by one participant, Eric. During his interview he expressed how lucky he had been to have several great administrators over the years.

Although the fact that each participant's portrayal of their administration over the years varied, the idea of a lack of support was present in all of them. Black teachers frequently identify their administration as unsupportive in literature when speaking about their interactions with school authorities (Knaus, 2014; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016).). With all leaders complicit in racim (Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2014), the pervasiveness of racism within school leadership, organization, culture, and practices will remain a challenge for all teachers of color.

In theme three of the major findings, participants addressed the burden of school policies. By law, each student who receives services under IDEA must have an IEP (34 CFR §§300.100-300.199). For participants in this study, the aspects of monitoring and developing an IEP were their biggest burden. This is most concerning for Black special education teachers' persistence because the planning and facilitation of IEP's is the root cause for the exodus of many special education teachers (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Having IEPs are troublesome for Black special education teachers because it challenges the possibility for an increase in the representation of Black SPED teachers. Waverly, the most vocal about her dismay with IEPs, stated,

> so having to teach you know, several different subjects, then you go in and you
>
> have to do support in other classes. Then you also have to case manage and
>
> meet with the students. Then you also have to hold meetings and then you have

to progress monitor their goals and how they're reaching them. So, all of those

aspects are very, very, challenging. And I feel like, honestly, that's a lot of roles

for one person to do.

Most participants complained about how writing IEPs took away from time to make better lesson plans. In addition to case management, teacher evaluations also served as a point of contention among participants. Because evaluations are created with a colorblindness perspective, it in large part maintains race inequality (Gillborn, 2014). Black teachers are automatically put at a disadvantage and more likely to receive lower rating than their White counterparts (Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2018). Pursuant to section 1012.34, Florida Statutes (F.S.) Florida's performance evaluation must include indicators for student performance, instructional practice, and other indicators to determine the final evaluation rating. For the participants, each felt the evaluation was not reflective of the students and the work they did. According to Diane, "they [administration] need to take into consideration the things that we go through, the different behaviors that we have to deal with as well as the different levels that these kids are." Equally troubled by the evaluation system Wallace asked, "how can you do a formal evaluation if you are not equipped with the understanding and the skill set?" All participants believed there needed to be a new performance evaluation more conducive to the work of special education teachers.

Alignment of Findings to the Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, critical race theory was used as the guiding theoretical framework for this study. Critical race theory provides a lens for critical discernment.The tenets of CRT, which include permanence of racism, counter storytelling, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and a critique of liberalism, offer explanations of race and racism that may be experienced by Black teachers (Lynn & Dixon, 2013). Based on the findings of this study, the tenets of CRT are

evident in the experiences of Black special education teachers. Both conscious and unconscious racism radiated participant experiences. Diane discussed the double standard in treatment between Black and White teachers at her school and Eric discussed confronting microaggressions in the workplace.

Tenets of CRT identified and used for this study include permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and counter-storytelling. Permanence of racism asserts racism is ingrained in the fabric of American society (Hiraldo, 2010). In this study, this was evident in participant experiences, as all described instances of racism in their career. Perhaps the most common experience shared amongst participants were the emboldened responses of White colleagues who often spouted racially charged and insensitive comments and beliefs regarding Black students and parents. Comments such as "if their parents were better parents" and "these kids can't learn." Wallace and others all shared hearing these comments in passing, during faculty meetings, and trainings. The apparent ignorance of White teachers who felt emboldened to use insensitive language without fear or repercussions, highlights the realities of Black special education teachers. While this form of racism is not as egregious as blatant acts of racism, it is so deeply rooted in the Black experience. It can leave many Black special education teachers dealing with the effects of racial trauma alone and could lead to a poor sense of belonging (Mosley, Hargons, Meiller, Angyal, Wheeler, Davis, & Stevens-Watkins, 2021).

In addition to permanence of racism, a critique of liberalism was also identified and used to examine the Black special education teachers for this study. A critique of liberalism is based on three notions: colorblindness, incremental change, and neutrality of the law (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In examining the experiences of participants for this study, this tenet of CRT is shown in the practice of teacher evaluations. With color-blind policies such as *Race to the Top*,

and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* pushing White normatives while excluding the realities of

unequal conditions, Black special education teachers are placed at a disadvantage when being

evaluated (Capmbell, 2021). Although the rubric used for formal evaluations is touted as neutral

and color-blind, all participants felt the current evaluation did not accurately evaluate their work.

In fact, Eric believes they are designed such so people do not do well. His suspensions hold some

validity when look at the data. Statistically, Black SPED teachers teaching students who are

Black, low performing, and come from low socioeconomic status receive lower ratings on their

evaluations (Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2018). Since this represents the descriptions most

participants would describe their students as, formative evaluations make it hard for Black SPED

teachers to receive high ratings and thus challenges their persistence.

Secondly, whiteness as property posits race and property are interrelated constructs that

have afforded Whites power and privilege (Capper, 2015). In this study, exclusive privileges

unattainable to Black SPED teachers was revealed. In Eric's interviews he recalled a situation

when a White teacher was given a promotion over him at work, despite the quality of his work

being used by the district as a model. The exclusive privilege that is being White prevented what

Eric believes an opportunity for advancement.. Lastly, participants stories illuminate the

experiences of special education teachers navigating the world of special education while Black.

Within CRT there is a strong emphasis on sharing the stories of people of color in order to

present different perspectives that challenge the very narrative that conceals and maintains racial

injustice (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). With this counternarrative, the experiences of

Black special education teachers are used to cast doubt. Although Black SPED teachers

experience some of the same strains White SPED teachers face, their experiences within special

education are not the same. Black SPED teachers must also contend with the added strains of

being Black and working in a system that employs practices and policies of Whiteness. For the participants of this study, this was expressed best by Diane who stated, "I don't get treated like the others [White teachers]."

Discussion on Research Questions

The following section offers a discussion of the findings in relation to the initial research questions posed at the start of this study. This discussion is organized into three sections: (a) What are the lived experiences of Black special education teachers? (b) What do Black special education teachers view as influential to their persistence in continuing in their positions? (c) How do Black special education teachers maneuver around common barriers in special education?

What are the Lived Experiences of Black Special Education Teachers?

As seen in the literature review in chapter two, there were limited studies that offered perspectives on the lived experiences of Black special education teachers. With this study, I offer a better understanding in chapter four. The findings of this study indicate Black special education teachers experience many of the same strains Black teachers face in general. Like the literature review, Black special education teachers experience racial battle fatigue (Duncan, 2019), work at some of the most troubled schools (Farinde et al., 2016), and experience a lack of support from administration (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016). What sets Black special education teachers apar is the compounded strains of working in special education. In addition to the common strains experienced by Black teachers within the literature, participants noted the strains of case management and a lack of understanding from teachers, leaders, and policymakers. For the participants in this study, being a Black special education teacher is a fragile position. It is a job that can be extremely rewarding but complex and challenging to maintain. Compounded with the

strains common to all special education teachers' race can exacerbate the already challenging job of teaching in special education. Thus, by exercising a double conscientiousness Eric and other participants move through the two worlds.

What do Black Special Education Teachers View as Influential to Their Persistence in Continuing in Their Positions?

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), cite four major reasons teachers leave the profession: (a) poor working conditions, (b) limited funding and support, (c) limited opportunities for advancement, and (d) a lack of administrative support. For the participants in this study, the impact of poor working conditions, limited funding, and limited opportunities for advancement had no bearing on their persistence. Participants were, however, influenced by their students, support, and, to a lesser extent, administration. In the interviews conducted for this study, participants Eric and Wallace were the only two participants whose persistence in special education had been remotely influenced by their administration. Eric had stayed at his school because of the support of his administration, while Wallace had left a school of six years because of administration. Although each had described instances when administration influenced their persistence, this only applied to their persistence at a particular school. For both these men and all the participants in this study, their reason for being and staying in special education was for their students.

After working in special education collectively several decades, these participants love for their students is the number one driving force for all. The satisfaction they all receive from pouring into their students was, as Wallace put it, "priceless." Each participant acknowledged the unique position they played in the outcomes of so many of their students. With most participants choosing to work in urban schools with large minority populations, there is a strong desire

amongst participants to push their students to do well academically and personally. Too many times Black special education teachers reported instances of explicit and implicit racism toward Black students and parents. By teaching, all participants were able to combat these acts and improve the overall experiences of Black students. This was the single greatest factor for persistence amongst Black SPED teachers.

Outside of the satisfaction received from working with their students, participants also cited other people, internal motivation, and training as key factors to their persistence. Participant Diane credited her persistence in special education to a lady at her church. During her first year at her current school, Diane thought about quitting every day. Despite this, Diane never gave up thanks to the constant inspiration and support she received from her church. For Diane and many in the Black community, the Black church is a source of hope and encouragement. It is a place for "spiritual assistance and strength to cope with the stressful experiences and the psychological pain of racism and discrimination" (Cosby, 2020, p. 353). For teachers like Diane, the Black church dispels doubt and uncertainty. It provides support to overcome any oppression experienced in the job. With it, Diane developed an internal strength to continue and support others.

The last key factor cited was support. Participant Waverly expressed, "if it were not for the teachers and all the support I received during my first couple of years of teaching, I would not have made it." I found in speaking with participants this to be consistent across the board. The help of other teachers was essential to participant persistence. It is other teachers' tips and support that provide new teachers with tools to be successful and therefore increase persistence. With many special education teachers citing isolation as a challenge to working in special education (Mosley, 2018), having meaningful supportive relationships with peers appears to be

an important factor to persistence (Cormier, 2022). For Black special education teachers in particular, the support of other Black teachers has been found to improve working relationships with peers (Bristol, 2020) and improve their persistence (Brockenbrough, 2012). To better support Black special education teachers and increase their persistence, leaders should increase the representation of Black teachers.

How do Black Special Education Teachers Maneuver Around Common Barriers in Special Education?

Based on past studies, common barriers for special education teachers include challenging behaviors (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019), lack of administrative support (Prather- Jones, 2011), and workload manageability (Hester et al., 2020). For the participants in this study, none of the teachers expressed any issues with challenging behaviors during their interviews. Middle school teacher Waverly mentioned during her interview, "I don't really have any real like challenging behaviors." Most would explain they built strong relationships with their students and, as a result, did not face the same behavior challenges as others. An explanation for this is the cultural congruence theory. This theory posits that "teachers who know students' cultural backgrounds likely communicate more effectively with their students and understanding students' home culture and enables teachers to build stronger relationships with them" (Nieto & Boda, 2012, as cited in Hwang, Graff, & Berends, 2022, p. 3). Based on this, and participant responses, challenging behaviors were alleviated by strong relationships with students.

The second barrier managed by Black special education teachers is a lack of administrative support. With all participants claiming to have a supportive administrator at the time of the interview, instances of a lack of support from the administration seem to have no bearing on teacher persistence. No participants reported the support or lack of support from the

administration playing a role in whether they stayed or left special education, but rather whether they stayed at that school. Most participants felt their administration lacked an understanding of special education and thus preferred the absence of administration. Diane stated, "I'm fine. I don't need them to come in. I'm good with that." This finding contradicts previous literature that states the lack of administrative support is the cause of special education teacher burnout (Prather-Jones, 2011; Hester et al., 2020; Ansley et al., 2019). A possible implication for this finding can be attributed to participants belief that administration was unqualified when it came to all thing's special education. The teachers of this study did not need nor looked for the support of the administration. Thus, the support of administration was not needed. Instead, the support of peers proved to be more meaningful. During Diane's interview, she expressed that during her time at first school she received a lot of support from her fellow teachers, "they paired me up with somebody and the rest of my ESE team was right there with me, like supporting me." For Diane and others of this study, their peers were essential to their success, "we support each other, we're really there for each other."

The last common barrier to Black special education teachers is workload manageability. For the participants in this study, case management was the biggest barrier to managing their workload and persistence. Most participants admitted to taking shortcuts to meet these demands, such as focusing most of their time on writing individual education plans rather than creating lesson plans. Diane reported she was working an additional ten hours outside of school to write IEPs each week. These experiences are consistent with reports finding special education teachers devote more of their time to paperwork than other job responsibilities (Hester et al., 2020). With many Black special education teachers choosing to work at predominantly Black schools, managing IEPs poses a bigger barrier for Black SPED teachers because of the critical shortage of

SPED teaches in high minority schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). With this shortage means bigger caseloads and additional responsibilities beyond those that other SPED teachers encounter. For example, Diane discussed the challenges she and a coworker at her school encountered managing, developing, and conducting all the IEPs at her middle school.Once again, Black special education teachers are placed at a greater disadvantage opposed to their White counterparts. To combat this strain, participants found ways to cut corners. When writing IEPs, Waverly spent the most time on students she worked with or had in her class because it was easier for her to write their IEPs. Melvin acknowledged he gives on content to meet IEP requirements. Key for all participants when managing individual education plans was being organized.

Recommendations

The following section provides recommendations for this study. The recommendations are described below in two sub-headings: recommendations for administration and recommendations for policy.

Recommendations for Administration

It is no secret that Black special education teachers face insurmountable odds. In addition to the inherent disadvantages of working in special education (lack of resources, excessive paperwork, and challenging behaviors), race plays a significant role in exacerbating these challenges (Cormier, 2022). Common within participant experiences were instances of racial biases and race-based stressors, that were demeaning and demoralizing. Additionally, many school administrators place more demands on Black teachers, devalue their work, and provide little to no opportunities for leadership (Knaus, 2014). Two examples of this were shown in Eric and Diane's interviews. Eric performance with IEP had been used by the district as a model IEP,

yet a White peer was chosen over him for compliance. While Diane had been expected to complete IEPS for half the students at her middle school, after the VE Specialist quit.

Despite this, many of the strains expressed can be alleviated. As previously stated, school administrators lack an understanding of special education (Hester et al., 2020). For the participants of this study, most relied on the help of their peers when they needed support. Thus, it is my recommendation administration should receive additional training to become more informed. During leadership program preparation, future school leaders should be required to complete at least one course on special education practices, policies, and disabilities. This course should also include a component for fieldwork. Research suggests, understanding content-related issues, can improve a leader's ability to support teachers (Neumerski, 2013). Having a better understanding of the students and job responsibilities of special education teachers equips school leaders with an awareness necessary for not only support but will also help school principals to evaluate special education teacher performance more efficiently.

To address CRT notion of racism being engrained in education specifically, administration, preparatory programs for school leaders should provide training and support for leading diverse urban communities and dismantling the structures of racism found within schools. Curriculum for these courses should emphasize the voices of teachers of color. They should emphasize "racially biased leadership development," that provides context to racism in urban schools, and can stop the propagation of justified racism (Knaus, 2014, p. 440).

Additionally, in light of the current contemporary political tensions in the state of Florida, the recommendations and findings of this study can be seen in opposition with the current political climate in the state. With the governor at the time of this study banning critical race theory in schools and defunding diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges. The

recommendation to provide training and support for leading diverse urban communities and dismantling the structures of racism found within schools presents a challenge for those who would like to implement these recommendations. With the threat of attack, from those who aim to shutdown conversations on race and ignore the realities, many will find it hard to act on these recommendations. To combat this, I propose organizations stand together and push for change. It will take the support of many to push back against the attacks on "woke" education. We must stand resolute in knowing that our work cannot and should not be regulated by politics. The conversations concerning race, interest conversion, allies, and intersectionality's, need to be had. Therefore, studies like mine need to continue to be addressed so that these conversations may continue. Using freedom of speech as a tool, class discussions on race can continue. Although professors and schools may resist implementing courses on diversity, these conversations can take place in any class or subject as racism is engraved in the fabric of American society.

Recommendations for Policy

Outside of school leadership, adjustments to structural inequities in policies is also an area for reform. Teacher evaluations reinforce whiteness while marginalizing Black teachers (Saalzar, 2018). Throughout this study, participants consistently expressed their dismay for the current evaluation system. They felt it was unreflective of their work and their students. Teacher evaluations are described as neutral and objective tools used to determine teacher effectiveness. However, these tools places whiteness at the center for what is believed to be great teaching (Salazar & Lerner, 2019). Therefore, to address this issue, a new culturally responsive alternative should be used. For this CRT researchers propose the Framework for Equitable and Excellent Teaching (FEET) as an alternative (Salazar, 2018; Salazar & Lerner, 2019). FEET is designed to put marginalized communities of color at the center of teacher evaluations. It is composed of

"four dimensions, 15 competencies, and 60 indicators" (Salzar, 2018, p. 464). Additionally, this framework ask that policymakers use the following strategies when developing teacher evaluations:

- Use a range of tools, such as, but not limited to, teacher-generated assessments, standardized tests, student-generated artifacts (such as spoken word poetry, plays, artistic and creative works), testimonials, performance assessments, social justice simulations and projects, and parent/community feedback, to gauge students' full potential.

- Develop alternate methods of evaluating teacher effectiveness and student learning by including youth and communities in participatory action research projects to define equitable and excellent teaching.

- Create models that reflect the voices and lived experiences of children and families to place them at the center of teacher assessment activities.

- Involve students in the creation of questionnaires and other alternatives that collect information on student learning and instructor effectiveness.

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- Promote the use of teacher evaluation systems that take into account the opinions of a variety of interested parties, including higher education faculty, students, families, and community people.

- Encourage cooperation and assistance, consider using different terminology for teacher evaluation, such as "teacher and student development" or "teaching and learning cooperative."

Conclusion

Participants experienced race-based stressors in their roles, such as microaggressions and stereotypes, as well as a double standard for both Black teachers and students. Participants in this study shared a preference for working in schools with a high minority population, and the role of administration on Black special education teacher's experiences demonstrates the many manifestations of school leaders today. The tenets of CRT, which include permanence of racism, counter storytelling, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and a critique of liberalism, were identified and used to examine the experiences of Black special education teachers. This form of racism is deeply rooted in the Black experience and can leave many Black special education teachers dealing with the effects of racial trauma alone. Black SPED teachers are placed at a disadvantage when being evaluated due to color-blind policies such as *Race to the Top* and the *Every Student Succeeds Act.*

Additionally, participants stories illuminate the experiences of SPED teachers navigating the world of special education while Black. These experiences are used to cast doubt and highlight the added strains of being Black and working in a system that employs practices and policies of Whiteness. This study found that Black special education teachers experience many of the same strains as Black teachers in general, such as racial battle fatigue, and lack of understanding from teachers, leaders, and policymakers, but these issues are compounded by the challenges of being a special education teacher. To combat these issues leadership preparatory programs should provide future administrators with training and support for leading diverse urban communities and dismantling the structures of racism found within schools and training to become more informed about special education by completing field work. Policymakers should develop a new culturally responsive alternative for evaluations that put marginalized

communities of color at the center of teacher evaluations.

Personal Reflection

I close this chapter with my own story, the implications of my researcher journal, a personal reflection on my views as a Black special education teacher, and a discussion of what . As I have mentioned earlier in this study, I identify as a Black female special education teacher. I have worked in special education for over five years in the state of Florida. As an educator in this field, I have worked with students of all grade levels and abilities. As both a scholar and an educator, I find myself observing and analyzing the actions of my peers. When I see the mistreatment of Black ESE students, I see the mistreatment of people like my brother. Like Wallace, my passion for special education is a direct result of my love for my younger brother, Michael. In his experience of being a Black child with a disability in the public school system, I saw a need for teachers and researchers like me. Teachers who would hold high expectations for their students and connect culturally to their experiences, and researchers who could bring awareness to current race-based issues that continue to plague special education. My many years in special education has shown me there is no greater need than this.

Unfortunately, it has been my experience, that today their still exist a disconnect with providing equity within special education for Black students. I have seen first-hand the double standard when it comes to teaching and discipline within special education. I have seen Black ESE students receive (harsher) disciplinary actions for the same offense of White students. I have heard fellow coworkers justify their lack of teaching, by explaining that "these kids cannot learn." I have seen the effects of words like "stupid, dumb, and bad" told by teachers manifest into self-perceptions of students. At the same time, I have also seen the difference Black teachers make for Black students who feel that they are being heard and seen for the very first time. In my

attempt to bring about change, I conducted this study. I wanted to know what drives Black special education teachers and how they overcome so many obstacles that push too many away.

Although I met the criteria to be a participant in this study, I chose to rely solely on the stories of others. This helped me to share the views and perspectives of Black teachers in special education. As such, the stories of the teachers interviewed resonated with my own. Their experience and their strains are also mine. As the researcher and a member of the group I studied, I find myself pondering whether my role as the researcher has influenced the participants' stories to align with my own, or of if the resemblances are merely coincidental. Additionally, I contemplate whether the shared experiences are representative of common perspectives among Black teachers in special education. As I have mentioned prior in this study, I employed the use of a journal to help triangulate data collected. During the process of collecting data, my journal entries served as a tool to reflect and evaluate my voice in sharing participant stories. As a researcher, I was always cognizant of my identify and my relation to the subjects I studied. Because of this, I was often hesitant in the way in which I shared participant stories. I made sure to minimize the significant impact of my personal experiences in order to maintain objectivity. However, reflecting back, the implications of doing so has made me question whether I made the right choice. In attempt to silence my voice, I wonder if I missed opportunities to expand on data and provide a greater understanding for readers. As the researcher for the findings of this study, I find it best to leave that decision to the readers. For now, I am resolute in knowing this study provides a perspective that has remained untold for too long.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research: Policy and Leadership Accountability on Black Special Education Teacher Persistence
Interview Date:_____ Interview Time:_____

Place: TBD by Participant

Participant's Name:_____Pseudonym_____

Verbal Re-confirmation of Consent Form already signed: Yes: _____ No_____

- The interviews will take place online via Teams or Zoom.
- To protect the identity of the participants, each participant will remain anonymous and given a pseudonym.
- Prior to the start of the interview, the participants will be reminded that the interview(s) will be audio recorded.
- Semi-structured, open-ended interviews will be conducted for approximately 60 minutes each interview
- The interview will begin with an opening statement to share why I am interested in this study and inform them of my intention of learning about the experiences of successful black special education teachers teaching students with high incidence disabilities.
- A set of semi-structured open-ended questions will be asked, see Appendix F. At the end of each interview, participants will be asked if they have any questions or additional comments. In the closing statement, I will ask if there is anything that's important for me to know about their story that I didn't ask.
- The participants will be reminded that they will receive a copy of the interview transcript and will be asked to review and revise of its accuracy. They will also be reminded of a possible follow up interview if clarification is needed.
- The interview will be closed by thanking the participants for their time and sharing that compensation will be given once they have completed the review of the interview transcript.

Appendix B: Interview Questions
Opening Statement
I am interested in learning about the success of Black teachers teaching high incidence disabilities in West Florida. With there being very few Black special education teachers, there is a need to understand why those that work in the field stay. Therefore, I am excited to hear about the attributes that you believe contribute to your success. It is my hope that this information can be used by district and schools to attract and retain future Black special education teachers.
Background Questions
Tell me about yourself
What certifications do you hold in education? How long have you taught in special education?

How many schools have you worked at during your career? What do you currently teach?
How long have you worked at your current school?
Describe the demographics, disabilities, and abilities of the students in your classroom and school?

Interview 1 Questions
- Tell me the story of why you became a special education teacher? Include any people who may be instrumental in helping to shape your aspirations to become a special education teacher.   - Describe to me what was you first-year teaching like? What went well? What went wrong? How did you first feel about going in special education?   - Since your first-year teaching what aspects of special education do you find most challenging?   - What personal strategies do you use to respond to challenging situations.   - As a special education teacher, a common struggle is case management. In Florida there is no policy regarding a cap on how many students an ESE teacher can have on their case load. How does the development and implementation of Individualize Education Plans affect your job responsibilities as a special education teacher? What struggles do you have managing your case load? And how do you manage those demands?   - Influential to the overall experiences of all teachers are administration. Tell me about your relationship with your school administrator. What role does your administrator play in your day-to-day routines in the classroom? What support or lack of support does your administrator provide with challenges in your role?   - Tell me about a time you did not feel supported as a special education teacher by your administration.   - What ways do you believe administration can be more supportive for special education teachers?   - One of the responsibilities of school administrators is to complete formal evaluations. How do you feel about the current evaluations system? What way do you believe the current evaluation system can be improved for special education teachers?   - In addition to the challenges that come with your position as a special education teacher, as a black teacher you may experiences challenges due to race. Can you tell me about any negative experiences you have had as a teacher that you believe was a result of our race?   - With your role as a black teacher tell me about any experiences you have had with microaggressions at work and the impact of those experiences? If you have never experienced this as a teacher what do you think takes place in your school that prevents that treatment from happening

Interview Questions (Continued)

- As a black teacher how do you maneuver around negative stereotypes held regarding Black women/men at school? If this is not something you are concerned about tell me why stereotypes are not a concern for you at your school.
- Tell me about a time when you thought about leaving special education. What made you stay?
- What people, experiences or skills do you contribute influential to your success in education?
- What has been the most rewarding experiences in special education?
- If you could
- As a black teacher how do you maneuver around negative stereotypes held regarding Black women/men at school? If this is not something you are concerned about tell me why stereotypes are not a concern for you at your school.
- Tell me about a time when you thought about leaving special education. What made you you stay?
- What people, experiences or skills do you contribute influential to your success in education?
- What has been the most rewarding experiences in special education?
- If you could go back in time, what is one piece of advice you would give yourself when you started teaching?
- Lastly, if you had an opportunity to change or implement a policy, program or process that would make your job easier and help with increasing the representation of black teachers in special education what would that be?

Interview 2: Will be used to explore any topics of interest and to gain further clarity on any stories as necessary.