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**NARRATIVES THAT MATTER: SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER STORIES AND
EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATING BLACK STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

A Dissertation Submitted to Molloy University
The School of Education and Human Services
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Environments

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By
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Dr. Warren Whitaker, Dissertation Supervisor

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**MOLLOY
UNIVERSITY**

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

Black students with disabilities receiving special education services provide unique challenges to the current education system that was designed for white, able bodied and minded individuals. Teachers, more specifically, special education teachers, who are often white, play a vital role in serving as a first level of support and having a significance influence on potential short and longterm outcomes for Black students with disabilities. This qualitative narrative inquiry study of six Prek-eighth grade special education teachers sought to understand their stories of preparation for and approaches to teaching Black students with disabilities. This study is important because it provides insight into special educators' teachers self-efficacy and preparedness in working with Black students with disabilities. Disability studies/critical race theory (discrit) and teacher selfefficacy theory were used as theoretical frameworks. Data collection occurred through reflective narrative essays, demographic questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The analysis of the participants' stories produced five significant findings: 1.) Teacher preparation and professional development recommendations 2.) Perceived expectations vs. perceived reality 3.) Confidence produced through intrinsic motivation and extrinsic supports 4.) Preparation for educating Black students with disabilities 5.) Educational responsibility for Black students with disabilities. Implications suggest that teacher preparation programs and in-service training must provide proactive strategies and skill-based knowledge to increase teachers' competency and sense of self-efficacy for addressing the diverse needs of Black students with disabilities. Limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for future research are provided.

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I give thanks to God, because none of this would be possible without his grace and favor. To my mom, you are the definition of strength, and I thank you for being a prayer warrior and role model in my life. To my husband, I thank you for encouraging me and motivating me to persevere and not procrastinate. Obtaining this degree is in honor of my twin brothers Sean and Seon, who left this earth too soon; your legacy will live on for eternity. To my dad and my big brother, I thank you for cheering me on along the way. Thank you to all my friends, family and cohort members who never stopped encouraging and believing in me. My work is for every under served and marginalized youth, every dreamer, every immigrant, every first-generation college student, and all Black girls and boys who dare to dream big, make an impact, and believe the unimaginable.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, individuals from ethnically diverse backgrounds with varied socioeconomic status have been disadvantaged when attempting to obtain an education to prepare them for the successful transitions to adulthood. Black students attending public schools in the United States have been disadvantaged across every measure of academic success (Taylor & King 2021). Wald and Losen (2003) discussed that high-poverty and high-minority schools are under-resourced, have fewer qualified teachers, and have less access to advanced-level courses in comparison to their affluent White peers. More specifically, Black students with disabilities attending K–12 schools in the United States do not progress academically at the same rate as other races.

Blanchett (2009) asserted that special education students attending urban schools in the United States have historically been miseducated and face unbalanced experiences in the educational system. Nevertheless, education plays a pivotal role in determining Black special education students' future quality of life.

In the United States, disproportionality is a symptom of the more significant inequities that have impacted Black students with disabilities. Black students receiving special education are less likely to achieve academic goals and have poorer long-term outcomes, such as employment rates and postsecondary enrollment rates (Sanford et al., 2011). These students often encounter structural and systemic inequities within school communities, institutional barriers, racism, teacher shortages, teachers with few years of experience, teacher with limited qualifications, and teachers with insufficient professional teacher training to work effectively with diverse students (Banks et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2009). The factors discussed above contribute to the systematically intentional achievement gaps within education that inhibit access and equity to quality education for Black students with disabilities. These gaps are evident in

disparities such as Black students' performance on standardized tests scores, high school graduation rates, high dropout rates, low enrollment in postsecondary education, lower levels of academic success, and higher rates of college attrition (Hartney & Flavin, 2014; Taylor & King, 2021; Wald & Losen, 2003). Landmark cases such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* prohibited segregation in 1954 (Brown, 2007). However, policies and practices established before desegregation created an educational system designed to deny equal access to Black individuals. It continues to have a lingering and lasting impact on the lives of Black students with disabilities today.

In school districts serving Black students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, it is the school that exacerbates the educational disadvantages. These schools suspend, expel, retain, assign to special education, and deny entrance into gifted/talented and AP course for Black students. This work on categorical inequality indicates that many of these disparities come as a result of teacher discretion (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p.69).

Ladson-Billings (2001) identified the importance of educators considering how students' racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic status contribute to a student being identified for special education services, as she further claimed that it was not uncommon for an urban teacher to identify their entire class as at-risk. Teachers play an essential role in the lives of students. Therefore, teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training designed to meet the needs of students with intersecting marginalities, such as Black and disabled, are essential for the progress and postsecondary success rate of students with disabilities. According to the National Education Association (2007), classifying students as disabled can influence special education teachers to have lower expectations for their students. Because students spend most of the day in classrooms with their teachers, the perception of their capabilities is often evident in the student learning outcomes.

The school-to-prison pipeline begins with classroom teachers interacting with their students from a deficit lens without understanding students' cultural capital and a lack of understanding of students intersecting marginalized identities (Sealey-Ruiz, 2011). Wald and Losen (2003) asserted that the term school-to-prison pipeline was developed by educators, observers, and advocates to describe the mirrored treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system and the educational policies in school, such as the zero-tolerance, increased police presence in schools and the racial disparities in school suspension with Black students receiving harsher punishments than their more affluent White peers for school code violations. National trends show that many Black students with disabilities, such as learning and behavioral challenges, are pipelined from public schools into juvenile and criminal justice systems (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2021).

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989), is a framework for conceptualizing Black womanhood, previously perceived as separate entities both by feminist theory and antiracist politics. Crenshaw recognized that due to the marginalization Black women faced through discrimination, sexism, and racism, their voices and needs go unacknowledged. Additionally, Crenshaw highlighted the notion that double discrimination occurs due to multiple existing identities such as race, gender, and physical abilities. Intersectionality acknowledges that the identities of a Black individual cannot be viewed through a single axis but rather through the intersection of multiple dissecting identities for which they experience discrimination against, marginalized, and disadvantaged under the auspices of White supremacy, sexism, and ableism.

This study focused on the intersection of race and disability experiences for Black youths in education. More specifically, being a Black student with disabilities receiving special education services in schools.

In this study:

A child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with 300.304 through 300.311 as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, sites.ed.gov, 2018).

In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA, sites.ed.gov, 2023). The IDEA law mandates eligible students with disabilities, ages 3 – 21, are entitled to a free appropriate public education and are provided with special education services, accommodations, and programs to meet their needs.

In this study, the term disability, as defined above, reflects the educational eligibility classification or category for which a child qualifies for special education as a result of the condition on a child's learning under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Throughout the research, person first language is used to acknowledge the person, in this case, the valued lives of Black students before the disability, a secondary identity marker for students.

This study defines Black students as those with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa, including Black Americans, Africans, Haitians, Afro-Caribbeans, and Black South or Central Americans (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research [CIBMTR] Forms Manual). As a first-generation Black Caribbean immigrant in the United States, I want to emphasize that the definition of Blackness inclusive of the diaspora further acknowledges the multiple identity markers that Black students present within the classroom as opposed to a single axis view. As Lyiscott asserted:

As we think about the future of equity and justice in education, I am reaching to my past self, who did not have access to the kind of inclusive worlds that we are dreaming of. I am reaching into my community's collectivity that values what academia cannot value, especially because it cannot be measured – spirit, affect, and rhythm. A knowing and a being that exists powerfully across Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. That's who I'm doin' it for (Lyiscott in Lyiscott et al., 2021, p.12).

Problem Statement

Racism and ableism exist within societal systems as well as within the classroom.

Therefore, it is imperative to understand how prepared teachers are to educate students with intersecting marginalized identities, many of whom are predominantly white. Teachers' cultural beliefs and feelings of self-efficacy toward educating Black students with disabilities impact how they interact with them, how much they value students and believe in their potential to succeed. Special education teachers play an essential role in the lives of students with disabilities. Charlton (1998) asserted that the instruction, expectations, relationships, and experiences students with disabilities experience with their teachers affect how they internalize their potential, strengths, and abilities. Harry and Klingner (2014) found that teacher quality varied across general education, lower-income neighborhoods, and Black neighborhoods, but although similar, these qualities were not as apparent within special education. Harry and Klingner reflected that the general approach to special education is that students must fit into the program, as opposed to program modifications and accommodations meeting the needs of the students. In addition, Harry and Klingner found that it may be difficult to differentiate between special education and general education due to the lack of individualization and routinely delivered generic whole-class instruction.

It is imperative to examine the teaching factors contributing to poor educational outcomes for Black students with disabilities. In school year 2021 – 2022, Black students comprised 17% of all students receiving special education services under IDEA and are second of racially diverse groups to Indigenous students (19%) students (NCES, 2022). There is minimal research on special education teacher self-efficacy related to teaching Black students receiving special education services (Chu & Garcia, 2014). More research is needed to identify and examine special education teachers' pedagogical choices and influence on Black students with disabilities.

Purpose

This study explored the stories and reflections of special education teachers' preparation and perception of self-efficacy for educating Black students with disabilities. It examined the influence of teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service professional development on teacher experiences. Teacher education programs often focus mainly on the skills needed to teach and not on the interpersonal aspects of teaching nor the need to disrupt deficit-based narratives of the intersecting marginalized experiences of students with disabilities (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017).

Therefore, this study fills the gap in examining special education teachers' insight and is significant in contributing to the discovery of ways to improve teacher education and preparedness for successfully educating Black students with disabilities. Obtaining the stories related to teacher experiences helped with understanding what trainings, courses, and experiences they believed are most valuable to increasing their self-efficacy and preparedness to teach Black students with disabilities in special education. Furthermore, the findings of this research can influence policy change and lead the way for educational leaders to improve practices and curricula in teacher preparation programs within higher educational programs. It can specifically provide the knowledge needed to lead to improvements in special education

teachers' ongoing in-service training. Most importantly, it can lead to better postsecondary outcomes for Black students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the exploration of this study:

Overarching: What stories do special education teachers tell when they describe their preparation for educating Black students with disabilities?

1. What learning experiences do special education teachers describe as most important for their preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?
 - A. What are the key stories participants tell when they describe their understanding of special education teacher learning experiences in preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?
 - B. What are the key stories participants tell to describe their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities?
2. How are such stories demonstrating special education teachers' prior knowledge of race and disability in education?
 - A. How do the stories describe their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?
 - B. How do the stories of their prior knowledge influence their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?

Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilized teacher self-efficacy theoretical frameworks to explore teachers' reported self-efficacy about their preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities based on their teacher preparation and ongoing in-service training.

Discrit Theory

Discrit theory is a framework that combines disability studies (DS) and critical race theory (CRT) (Connor et al., 2016); and focuses on examining the lived societal experiences related to intersections of ableism and racism. The theory was named by Subini Annamma and developed by people of color and people with dis/abilities to dismantle discourse about the meaning of race and disability in society. Annamma saw the importance of visibility in the perceptions of students with marginalized intersecting identities. There is an overrepresentation of Black students in special education, which contributes to the achievement gap and serves as a precursor to the initiation of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Discrit in education theorizes about the interlocking relationship of racism and ableism, specifically, how it impacts students of color differently than White students with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013). Discrit theory originated from persistent problems with a deficit-based understanding of difference, overrepresentation in adverse outcomes, the interlocking systems of oppression and how they affected the lives of people with disabilities (Connor et al., 2016). The seven tenets of discrit highlight the multidimensional intersections of race and disability, how ableism and racism occur interdependently and how the social constructions of the terms impact the lives of individuals with marginalized intersecting identities (Annamma et al., 2013). Discrit framework is used in this research as a form of resistance and activism to improve teacher education and practice.

Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory

Psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) coined self-efficacy, which refers to a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Teachers' self-efficacy plays a role in motivating and influencing students' academic achievement outcomes. Therefore, exploring teachers' self-efficacy toward working with Black students with disabilities benefits this research.

Bandura (1994) identified four primary sources influencing teachers' self-efficacy: mastery experiences, social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Studies have highlighted the notion that teachers' self-efficacy varies widely, depending on how teachers perceive their ability to execute effective practices successfully and whether they believe they have what it takes to bring about change (Berg & Smith, 2018; Chu, 2011; Doran, 2020).

Understanding how these four sources are developed in participants to prepare them to work with Black students with disabilities is necessary to determine the contributing factors for students' success and postsecondary outcomes. Teacher self-efficacy in this research is important because it measures teachers' perceived capabilities and not teachers' intentions (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy provides a beneficial lens to this research in that it helps us understand feelings, perceptions, reflection, and confidence as crucial indicators for effective teaching.

According to Chu (2011):

In terms of culturally, ethnically/racially, and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, teachers with high outcome efficacy are more likely to believe that students will be successful when instruction is adapted to meet their needs, whereas teachers with low outcome efficacy may not acknowledge the likelihood of student-teacher misunderstandings decreases when their students' cultural background is understood (p. 388).

Special education teachers' narrative stories shed light on their feelings of self-efficacy about their ability to educate Black students with disabilities based on what they identify as being essential aspects of their preparation and training.

Methods and Design

"With shared stories as its focal point, the overall objective of narrative inquiry is to capture a glimpsed understanding of lived experiences" (Esposito & Evans-Winters,

2021, p. 67)

A narrative inquiry methodology, as described by Bhattacharya (2017), is a type of qualitative study used by "researchers who are interested in understanding how people articulate their life experiences in the structure of a story" (p. 27) and "offers a lens, a framework to the study of storied lives" (p. 93). This study's qualitative approach used a narrative inquiry design to capture special education teachers' voices and experiences through narrative letters participants write to their younger selves as student teachers, individual interviews and focus group interviews. The pragmatic worldview in research guided this study, which was oriented toward real-world practice and a problem-solving approach that focuses on the consequences of research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This study used various forms of qualitative data collection methods to inform the problems explored in a study. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) asserted that the stories gathered in qualitative research design are collected to identify and make meaning through patterns of shared stories amongst participants. Therefore, it is critical to employ this method in the research to identify what teachers believe is beneficial and needed in their preparation and ongoing training programs to make them feel most efficient in the classroom.

Site Selection and Participants

Participants were selected based on purposeful sampling and this study included six state certified public-school special educators who met the following research criteria; (1) worked within an urban community in the United States (2) state certified special educators (3) teach Black students with disabilities (4) in their first to fifth year of teaching since graduating from a teacher preparation program (5) completed a teacher preparation program in-person, hybrid, or online only and participated in a field service placement in a PreK -12th grade school (virtual and in-person) qualified for the study. Special Education teachers who taught and completed a

teacher preparation program virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic also qualified as participants if they meet the above-mentioned categories. For this research, the race of the special education teachers is not a factor in determining their qualification to participate in the study. Instead, it focuses on special education teachers in their initial to 5 year of teaching experience working with Black students with disabilities.

Data Collection

Through narrative essays, participants wrote letters to their younger selves as student teachers as they reflected on their teacher preparation program ongoing in-service special education professional development training that prepared them to work with Black students with disabilities. After each participant completed the essay, they then engaged in one-on-one semi-structured and open-ended interviews to further discuss and expand on the stories written via Zoom with the researcher. Lastly, two focus group interviews were conducted with participants and the researcher.

Analysis

Transcription of audio interview data were collected and transcribed through Rev.com recording and Zoom transcription. Field memos allowed the researcher to journal the process and write about discoveries and ideas after each participant completed their narrative essay and interview. The written transcripts were reviewed along with the audio recording simultaneously to ensure accuracy in the audible transcription.

The analysis was conducted through inductive methods, such that the information became points of analysis by the researcher (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As data was collected, the data analysis process occurred simultaneously. Codes and themes were developed through computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software such as Dedoose. As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), as each form of data is collected the researcher will

simultaneously analyze documents and interviews collected earlier. Coding was conducted in two coding cycles. Preliminary coding schemes employed in-vivo coding, open-coding, descriptive and value coding were developed during the initial stages of collecting data. The second stage was implemented to further conceptualize all the data collected to analyze the patterns, and categorization of words or phrases reflecting commonalities and differences in the themes participants shared (Fraser, 2004). Strategies such as highlighting keywords, patterns, and documenting trends of participants' responses occurred throughout the initial and second coding cycles. Through coding methods, themes derived resulted from methods of inductive coding.

Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

While obtaining my master's degree in school psychology, I remember vividly one of my assignments during a course titled "Introduction to Special Education," which required me to write down my philosophy for education. In the paper, I discussed my vision for students with disabilities which was for all students receiving special education services to receive a quality education and equitable opportunities for success regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, or zip code. Today, that philosophy still holds true and has led me on a journey through a doctoral program to be an advocate and voice for marginalized students with disabilities.

As a school psychologist, I play a significant role in the lives of students evaluated and recommended for special education services. However, over the past 11 years of practicing as a psychologist, I have had two recurring concerns. My first concern is the lack of academic growth amongst the students receiving special education services. My second concern is special education teachers' inability to support and educate students who present with high incidence disabilities such as learning disabilities, and behavioral challenges attending public schools. However, for the purposes of this research, teachers who work with students in low and high incidence disabilities categories were welcomed to participate. Having worked in predominantly

Black neighborhoods and with prior experience as a child protective specialist, I am passionate about serving and helping multiply marginalized students and school communities. I hope that once students are identified as having a disability requiring additional support and educational services will be educated by a teacher that is knowledgeable, experienced, and who feels confident in their ability to meet the need of the student to produce optimum success and postsecondary goals so that they will be an asset to society in the future.

My role in this research as an educator makes me an insider. However, since I am not a classroom teacher, my role shifts to an outsider as a school psychologist. With my background in Black history and education, I know the historical context associated with education as an institution created for White, able-bodied, neurotypical males. My prior knowledge of psychology helped me understand the power of the tools used in practice and how critical my daily role as a school psychologist is to my students, families, and coworkers. Guthrie (2004) described that in the 1930s, the Stanford Binet intelligence test was the primary psychometric measure of mental deficiency. The findings supported court-ordered sterilization of mentally deficient people without their consent, and this was a part of the eugenics movement in the United States. Although laws have been abolished and new ones enacted, such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* 1954, there continue to be long-lasting effects on the education of Black students in the United States, specifically Black learners with disabilities which highlights the importance for socially just research (Brown & Strega, 2015). As I stand on the heels of my ancestors and earlier scholars in the field, this research is essential to contribute to policy change for the progression of Black students with intersecting marginalized identities.

As a Black cisgender woman, my immigrant story to America, level of education, pedagogy, and work experiences as a non-disabled public servant with a history of working with majority Black individuals with disabilities for the past 19 years contribute to my subjective I's

brought into this study. My experiences have led me to know the importance and essential role that teachers play in the daily lives of children whom they spend most of the school day with their teachers. Therefore, it is essential to examine teachers' stories of their self-efficacy and feelings of preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities. However, throughout my research, I must be careful not to project my own daily experiences and interaction from working in a school setting to affect my perception of what I assume of teacher preparation and ongoing in-service training.

Assumptions and Limitations

Throughout this study, I must be careful to not project my personal experiences of being a school psychologist and encounters with special education teachers daily in the school setting to influence her overall perception and judgment of teacher preparation and training. Instead, the approach of this study is to seek answers to the research questions through the analysis of participant data. Limitations to this study include obtaining a large sample size of participants. Another is time constraints of teacher availability and the lack of time needed to carry out a longitudinal study that could provide a different data set if these participating teachers were in the field for more than 10 years. Since the study is not restricted to a specific state, recruiting participants from various states to represent a sample size representative of the United States posed to be a limitation. I seek to hear the stories and experiences of teachers in their initial year of teaching to their fifth year of teaching. The voices of veteran teachers will not be heard due to the qualifying categories for participants. This study will not explore the mastery and experience gained from being a veteran teacher.

Trustworthiness

Participants reviewed final recorded transcriptions and written samples to ensure the accuracy of their statements and triangulation to ensure the credibility of the data. The research

was peer debriefed by other qualifying persons who are unbiased to enhance validity. Member feedback was observed to ensure participant satisfaction throughout the research. Protecting participants' data and personal information were secured using an alias to prevent the identification of participants. Lastly, participants were informed that they can discontinue the study and remove themselves at any time.

Summary

This critical narrative qualitative research explores special education teachers' reflections about their preparedness and feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities based on their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service experiences through the lens of DisCrit and Self-Efficacy framework. Each participant must currently work within an urban community, with one – five years of post-graduate teaching experience working with Black students with disabilities. The research questions were answered through narrative reflecting stories written by the participants. After completing the narrative journal responses, participants engaged in one-on-one semi-structured and open-ended interviews to further discuss and expand on the stories written via zoom with the researcher, followed by two focus group discussions with the participants and researcher.

A narrative qualitative study approach was employed to capture special education teachers' voices and reflections about their feelings of self-efficacy and preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities through narrative letters they wrote to their younger selves as student teachers. According to Chu and Garcia (2014), there has been limited research on special education teachers' self-efficacy. Therefore, using the self-efficacy theory is essential in understanding teachers' self-reported feelings to educate Black students with disabilities. Incorporating discrit theory as a framework in this study will explain how the intersection of race and disability presents itself within classrooms. The research results will provide practitioners

and policymakers with information that allows them to serve Black students with disabilities better and increase opportunities for positive postsecondary outcomes. Next, there will be an introduction to key terms used throughout the research. The following chapters will comprise a detailed review of the literature and methodology.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms will ensure reader's understanding of the relevancy of how and why each term is utilized within the study.

Ableism - Ableism has been defined to include overt discrimination against people with disabilities, the notion that people with disabilities are inferior to non-disabled people, and the idea that a person's disability is a defining character flaw (Linton, 1998).

Black students - Black students within this study are those with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa, including Black Americans, Africans, Haitians, Afro-Caribbeans, and Black South or Central Americans (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research [CIBMTR] Forms Manual).

Intersectionality – Intersectionality acknowledges that the identities of a Black individual cannot be viewed through a single axis, but rather through the intersection of multiple dissecting identities they are discriminated, marginalized, and disadvantaged against under the auspices of white supremacy, sexism, and ableism (Crenshaw, 1989).

In-service teacher experiences - In-service education is defined as the relevant courses and activities in which a serving teacher may participate to upgrade his professional knowledge, skills, and competence in the teaching profession. Therefore, it encompasses all forms of education and training given to a teacher (Osamwonyi, 2016).

Postsecondary outcomes for students - Post-school outcome (PSO) data provide a picture of life after high school for former special education students in relation to postsecondary education and employment. Positive post-school outcomes involve some level of “engagement” after high school, meaning that former students are continuing their education or have secured employment. PSO data are collected not only for state and federal reporting but for continuous programmatic improvement (retrieved on 11/12/22 from www.seattleu.edu).

Racism - a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race (retrieved on 11/12/22 from merriam-webster.com).

Special education - Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—

- (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and
- (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children (retrieved on 11/12/22 from sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.39)

Students with disabilities - A child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with 300.304 through 300.311 as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, sites.ed.gov, 2018).

Teacher preparation programs – The United States Department of Education defines a teacher preparation program as a state-approved course of study, the completion of which signifies that an enrollee has met all the state's educational and training requirements for an initial credential to teach in a K-12 school (retrieved on 11/12/22 from crsreports.congress.gov).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the current literature related to the disparities in special education for Black students with disabilities, the theoretical frameworks of the research, and the various themes found across the literature. Special Education programs and services became mandatory when President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act into law in 1975 (IDEA, sites.ed.gov, 2023). It is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law ensures that eligible children with disabilities ages 3 - 21 are entitled to a free appropriate public education. However, gaps in the current education system inhibit access and equity to quality education for Black students with disabilities to achieve academic goals and postsecondary outcomes. These gaps are evident in disparities such as Black students' performance on standardized tests scores, high school graduation rates, high dropout rates, low enrollment in postsecondary education, lower levels of academic success, and higher rates of college attrition (Hartney & Flavin, 2014; Taylor & King, 2021; Wald & Losen, 2003).

While special education teacher preparation programs train teachers on pedagogy and skills needed to teach students with specific learning disabilities, teachers ultimately possess the characteristics necessary to effectively deliver the curriculum in ways that allow students to access the curriculum (Gottfried et al., 2019). Teacher programs must prepare teachers for classroom success and include content beyond academic and pedagogical knowledge. Teacher preparation and ongoing in-service training must address the need for educators to be culturally competent to the needs of their students, specifically in supporting Black students with disabilities to manage their academic and social-emotional needs of students for optimal success (Hoover et al., 2008). As such, further research is needed to understand teachers' perception of

their self-efficacy to educate students with intersecting marginalized identities, such as being Black and disabled.

Themes Across the Literature

The organization of the literature review is divided into two major themes (1) teacher preparation and diversity training and (2) teacher self-efficacy and preparedness to teach special education. Teacher preparation programs have an enormous task of preparing teachers for the field of teaching. Although educational programs have attempted to evolve to meet the growing needs of the diverse student population (Banks et al., 2013), teachers continue to enter classrooms with low self-efficacy in their ability to work with diverse populations. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2002), new teachers continue to leave these programs with feelings of doubt about their ability to provide instructional services for students with disabilities and feel even more unprepared to teach diverse students with special needs. Banks et al. (2013), found that special education students have better outcomes when educated by highly qualified teachers. Lee (2018) found that teacher qualification and years of teaching contributed to highly qualified teachers and showed a positive association with short- and long-term secondary students' education success.

As the number of students referred to special education increases across the nation, teacher preparation programs developed a fast-track alternative certification, which places teachers in the classroom to address the shortage of special education teachers (Sayman et al., 2018). Harry and Klingner (2014) reported on teacher quality and found a clear pattern of less prepared teachers in low-income, Black neighborhoods. The results indicated low-quality instruction, generic whole group instruction, and a lack of individualization (Harry & Klingner, 2014). In the next section, we explore the literature on teachers' preparedness to teach special

education students and special education teachers' preparedness to teach Black students with special needs through the lens of discreditation and self-efficacy.

Teacher Preparation and Diversity Training

Each of these bodies of literature aims to explore teachers' preparation to work with Black students with special needs. However, based on the available research, the terms diverse students or culturally and linguistically diverse students will also be incorporated in the literature review. This study primarily focuses on Black students with disabilities, as they are more likely to be criminalized and punished for being multiply marginalized when embedded against the social constructs in racism and ableism (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Racial noticing in teacher education elicits discussions and perceptions of race and racism along with the practice of antiracist teaching practices for preservice teachers (Shah & Coles, 2020). Teacher preparation programs must not avoid discussions of race and seek to engage preservice teachers about how racism operates in schools explicitly.

Chiu et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of culturally responsive teaching as a necessity that is significant to the educational experience of learners in an increasing global society. However, this research also indicated that there must be recognition that teaching about diversity can be uncomfortable for privileged racial majority groups and those who oppose diversity education and critical race theory. Teachers often hold on to stereotypical cultural beliefs and myths reflective of the significant need for teacher preparation programs to focus on supporting special education preservice teachers to understand implicit bias and its impact on students of color, specifically Black students with disabilities (Chiu et al., 2022). However, Ladson-Billings' (1999) reflected the same notion that many teacher preparation programs treat diversity as a necessary evil due to the Eurocentric perspective imposed by the state or accrediting agency.

Participating in one multicultural course, field experience, and in-service workshops without deep discussions surrounding race and racism prepares teachers with limited skills to teach culturally diverse youth (Robertson et al., 2017). Hernández-Saca et al. (2018) asserted that there is a hierarchy associated with disability, race, and the lack of understanding is due to the lack of intersectional understanding across special education and special education law. As highlighted by Annamma and Morrison (2018), "disability labels leveraged access for wealthy White students while serving as a barrier for Black students" (p. 49). For instance, the problematic exclusion and segregation practices faced by marginalized students with disabilities are not the same as White students; instead, White students tend to gain power in an inclusive program while receiving special education services (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Hernández-Saca et al., 2018).

Disproportionately in Special Education

Disproportionality is an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a particular student group within a setting or outcome of interest, given that group's proportion in the total population (Dever et al., 2016). Dunn's (1968) seminal work first raised the issue of the disproportionate representation of specific groups of African American and Native American students in special education. Dever et al. (2016) described that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) was reauthorized by Congress to include policies and procedures that required states to address and report disproportionality in special education amongst Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, Puerto-Rican Americans, and those from multilingual backgrounds; however, limited progress to address disproportionality. This research literature discusses disproportionality issues to reflect the impact on Black students with disabilities. Black students are faced with racial disparities in education, including being referred to special education at disproportionate rates, experiencing special education differently from Whites with disabilities,

and receiving higher rates of punitive actions such as suspensions for their behaviors, leading to the school-to-prison pipeline (Chiu et al., 2022; Dunn 1968; Togut 2011).

Race and Disability

According to Beneke and Cheatham (2020), there is limited research on teacher preparedness to discuss disability and race. While a diversity course, workshop, or module may introduce the subject of race, Young (2016) argued that many programs teach students about inequalities in education; however, only a few explicitly teach about the intersection between race, ethnicity, and diversity. Young suggested applying an intersectionality framework to student-teacher talk. Some authors discussed the concept of intersectionality and the interlocking systems of oppression that have affected disabled people of color by socially, culturally, and politically constructed identity themes that potentially set a firm foundation in teacher education programs (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Robertson et al., 2017).

Race and disability serve as identity markers with significant implications for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Hernández-Saca et al., 2018). Banks et al. (2013) found that teachers often indicate how unprepared they are for the challenges they face while working in urban schools with students with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds. There are demographic divides between pre - and in-service teachers, often White, non-disabled women, who often have little desire to teach in schools different from their backgrounds (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020; Boveda & Aronson, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Doran (2020) asserted that new teachers often find jobs in diverse school communities with high needs and high poverty rates, while lacking adequate preparation to work within those school communities. D'Haem and Griswold (2017) emphasized that teachers also frequently doubt their ability to work with culturally diverse students and engage their parents.

Prior studies on teacher preparation programs mainly focused on the theories and skills related to teaching, with a narrow focus extended to learning about fostering partnerships and interpersonal skills to work with students and their parents (Hiatt-Michael, 2006; LadsonBillings, 1999; Robertson et al., 2017). Since bias is not limited to incidents outside of the school environment, teachers often enter schools with biases against students of color, specifically those with disabilities. These thoughts and beliefs are usually unchanged after one multicultural course, and limited studies are available to assess teacher candidates' growth and development regarding race relations and their perceptions (Robertson et al., 2017). D'Haem and Griswold (2017) reported that teachers who are not from the same socioeconomic backgrounds as their students often view diverse students and their families from a deficit approach, leading to teachers engaging in "stereotyped or disparaging views of parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds" (p. 94). Students at the margins of race and disability experience multiple oppressive views and a deficit approach by educators who feel unprepared to educate them. To examine this issue further, Thomas et al. (2020) emphasized the following:

A cultural divide between teachers and students has the potential to result in deleterious impact ranging from a climate of low expectations, a deficit mentality, implicit bias, adverse disciplinary actions, disproportionate assignment to special education, and a posture of well-meaning color (and culture blindness) all of which lead students to various degrees of educational alienation (p. 89).

Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices

In response to the cultural divide between teachers and ethnically diverse students, there were calls to develop culturally responsive pedagogy to help teachers apply culturally relevant knowledge and skills in the classroom (Chu, 2011). Teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching honor their students' gifts and affiliations. The goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to

increase teachers' beliefs that all students can achieve their goals and improve student outcomes (Chu, 2011; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1999). Exploring how teachers' self-efficacy practices impact culturally relevant pedagogy will be explored in the next section.

Components of culturally responsive pedagogy require teachers to consider the diversity of their students' backgrounds, language, learning styles, values, and prior knowledge (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Additionally, teachers must consistently examine their own beliefs, values, and behavior. Villegas and Lucas (2002) characterized culturally responsive teachers as:

(a) Having socio-culturally consciousness, (b) having affirming views of culturally and linguistically diverse students, (c) seeing themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable, (d) understanding how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction, (e) knowing about the lives of their students, and (f) designing instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar (p. 321).

Another approach to culturally relevant pedagogy is discrit classroom ecology. Annamma and Morrison (2018) asserted that in discrit classroom ecology, teachers must refuse and resist deficit-oriented narratives about the behaviors and learning capabilities of Black students and other students of color. Annamma and Morrison (2018) further asserts that there are three interrelated constructs needed to dismantle the current educational structure and system, which includes:

1. DisCrit Curriculum, knowing your students' history and their present, and teaching about structural inequities and opportunities; and (2) DisCrit Pedagogy, learning about the teaching and teaching to students' gifts in the classroom; and (3) DisCrit Solidarity, situating students' actions in the classroom as strategies of resistance, often in response to interpersonal and state violence, and teaching them how to channel resistance to

dismantle systems. Through each of these constructs runs the core of DisCrit Resistance (p. 73).

Research between teaching efficacy and culturally relevant pedagogy is emerging (Chu & Garcia, 2014). However, an exploration of research related to teacher self-efficacy and their perceptions about their ability to engage in culturally responsive teaching, found that teachers were reportedly often unaware or unconscious of the bias present in the classroom, through the curriculum and instruction towards diverse students; however, when teachers reported high self-efficacy beliefs towards teaching culturally diverse students, it correlated towards a high outcome expectancy for the student population (Carrero & Lusk, 2014; Chu & Garcia, 2014). Most importantly, a common theme in the literature discussed the need for teachers to move away from deficit thinking toward multiple marginalized students. Teachers assigned to teach Black students must know about diversity, culture, race, and ethnicity. According to Chu (2011), teachers reported having limited knowledge about race, culture, and special education. Chu further asserted that teachers must design instruction specifically targeted to address culture, language, and disability to follow the concepts of culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, teachers must have access to meaningful training and teacher preparation while developing their critical consciousness to educate diverse students with special needs. However, Cruz et al. (2020) found that new teachers reported less confidence in their ability to implement culturally relevant teaching practices and required extra support when they entered the field.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Preparedness to Teach Special Education

The literature measuring teacher self-efficacy in special education is limited (Zhang et al., 2018). However, researchers explored this phenomenon and the challenges new teachers face while dealing with individual students' needs and challenges explicitly encountered towards students with disabilities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Freer, 2018; Mintz, 2019; Zhang et al.,

2018). Freer (2018) examined teacher attitudes towards disability and found that "educators' attitudes at all levels are critical because they act as gatekeepers to knowledge, future opportunities, and overall educational progression" (p. 583). Teacher attitudes toward disabilities are essential, as it influences how students with disabilities are perceived. Teachers who report high efficacy in teaching students with disabilities are more likely to accept students with disabilities and set high expectations and goals for their students than teachers who indicated low self-efficacy toward teaching students with disabilities (Zhang et al., 2018).

DeBettencourt and Nagro (2019) asserted that clinical field experiences, which allow students to put theory into practice alone, are insufficient in their ability to improve teacher reflections and self-efficacy towards working with students in special education. DeBettencourt and Nagro (2019) suggested that teachers who develop transformative thinking skills, exhibit the ability to become more self-reflective and self-aware educators capable of "making changes to their practice to improve the learning opportunities for their students" (p. 286). Further supporting those suggestions, Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that teachers who felt inadequate reported low self-efficacy and self-awareness, and they were more likely to blame students, the students' parents, and home environment, or the students' peers for the student's failure without the awareness or ability to reflect and consider that teachers also significantly influence students' achievement. Low self-efficacy seemingly reinforces teachers' deficit views of their student population.

Disability Studies and Special Education

"You cannot teach someone you do not believe in" – Emdin, 2016

It is critical to explore and understand special education teachers' perceptions of their confidence and efficacy in supporting Black students with disabilities in the classroom. It is even

more vital to explore how teachers understand the term disability and the effects of how they perceive students' abilities in their classroom.

Disability studies is an academic discipline that approaches disability from an interdisciplinary perspective and examines disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon (Ashby, 2012). Conventional views of disability have been mainly from a deficit perspective in its current place in education and within school communities. Disabilities studies, however, provide a framework that having a disability is not inherently a personal disadvantage; instead, it occurs through complex interactions between the individual and the larger social world (Ashby, 2012). Cosier and Pearson (2016) argued that when teachers view students with disabilities as the problem, that is a form of social oppression based on ableist views.

Ashby (2012) discussed the benefits and challenges of operating an inclusive elementary and special education teacher preparation program within a disability studies framework. Ashby described college students' perception of disability upon entering the program and how important it is to reframe the language and meaning of the word disability to ensure that students move away from the medical deficit model in their view of students with disabilities. Disabilities studies in education works to create access and inclusivity within schools for individuals with disabilities by bringing awareness to their daily lives and experiences. Disability studies include the social model of disability which challenges the narrative of disability that is viewed from oppressive perspectives (Conner et al., 2008). Disability Rights movements have worked to expand the deficit-based medical model, which focuses on the person as the problem (Goering, 2015).

Freer (2018) indicated that in the education sector, there are essential "stakeholders who impact the overall educational experience for students with disabilities" (p. 583). Special education teachers are at the top of that list. However, before teachers enter the classroom, their

level of preparedness is based on the skills and training they received during their teacher preparation programs. Scholars in the teacher education field have concluded that teacher preparation programs fail to adequately train future educators to address issues like disability and learning differences in the classroom (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). As contradictory as it may seem, this contributes to teachers' early beliefs that they cannot meet the needs of special education students.

Mintz (2019) found that new teachers' perceptions about teaching changed from the preservice to the novice teacher years and found that teacher self-efficacy improved with enhanced programs. Once teachers entered the classroom as teachers, there were limited changes. Mintz (2019) argued that novice teachers experience uncertainty in their ability to teach special needs students because they require more time for thinking and deliberation since they focus on teaching rather than students' learning. This dynamic aligns with Cosier and Pearson's (2016) thinking that many teachers' education programs and faculty are unaware of the disability studies perspective, which focuses less on the medical-deficit views of students with disabilities. Adoption of deficit views contributes to teachers' overcategorization of disability while limiting their ability to meet the learning needs of specific categories of children with special needs.

Taking Mintz's assertion further, Crowson and Brandes (2014) found that direct and indirect contact, social dominance orientation, intergroup anxiety, negative stereotypes, and self-efficacy were positive predictors for teachers to feel opposition to educating students with disabilities in a mainstream classroom. According to Cosier and Pearson (2016), "encouraging current and future teachers to critically analyze issues related to disability, equity, and access, teacher educators better prepare them to work with students with disabilities and their families in ways that promote equity and social justice" (p. 3). Therefore, when teachers hold negative

stereotypes towards the students they teach, it impacts students' ability to achieve academic and postsecondary outcomes.

Theoretical Frameworks

DisCrit Theory

My research combines *discrit* theory and teacher self-efficacy theory to understand special education teachers reported self-efficacy in their ability to educate Black students with disabilities effectively. According to Connor et al. (2016) disability critical race theory (discrit) is a framework in education that theorizes how race, racism, dis/ability, and ableism are built into the daily interactions, discourses, and educational institutions, affecting students of color with disabilities. Discrit theory, according to Connor et al. (2016) originated from concerns and persistent problems of a deficit-based understanding of difference, overrepresentation in adverse outcomes, and the interlocking systems of oppression and how it affects the lives of people with disabilities. I discuss the seven tenets of discrit below:

- (1) DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy
- (2) DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on
- (3) DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms
- (4) DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research
- (5) DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens
- (6) DisCrit recognizes Whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of

interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens (7) DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (Annamma et al., 2013, p.11).

Several studies support the notion that increasing special education teacher awareness of the intersections of multiple marginalized identities can lead to the improved curriculum of teacher training programs and serves to reform educators stereotyped views of students and parents from diverse backgrounds (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017). Annamma and Morrison (2018) stated that "teachers must explicitly refuse to believe that Students of Color act out more, are less capable of acquiring knowledge, or are more responsible for their behavior than other students" (p. 73). The academic literature on DisCrit addresses the preparedness issues concerning teaching diverse students with special needs.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that teachers who reported low self-efficacy and self-awareness were more likely to blame external factors such as the students, parents, home environment, and peers for their failure. The teachers did not exhibit the awareness or ability to reflect and consider that teachers also significantly influence students' achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Hines (2008) explored the interactive effects that race, and teacher self-efficacy have on the achievement gap, and found that students with highly efficacious teachers earned higher scores on benchmark tests than did students with teachers of low teaching self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy plays a crucial role in students' learning outcomes. Therefore, DisCrit framework is used in this research to discover how the structural powers of racism and ableism are explicitly or implicitly present within teachers and how it contributes to their feelings of self-efficacy in educating Black students with disabilities. Understanding the intersectionality between race and disability can expand our perspectives on the importance of educator training programs to explicitly address and prepare educators for such social implications.

Self-Efficacy Theory

In 1977, Psychologist Albert Bandura coined the term *self-efficacy*, which refers to a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Teachers' self-efficacy plays a role in motivation and influences students' academic outcomes and achievement. Teachers' belief in their ability to complete specific tasks is a strong predictor of student achievement, hence why exploring teachers' self-efficacy towards working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities is beneficial to education. Researchers have conducted a considerable amount of research on teacher self-efficacy, but few have studied teacher efficacy pertaining to educating students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds (Chu, 2011; Zhang et al., 2018).

Few studies highlight that teachers' sense of self-efficacy varies widely. Studies find that self-efficacy is evidenced by how teachers perceive their ability to execute effective practices successfully and whether they believe they have what it takes to bring about change (Berg & Smith, 2018; Chu, 2011; Doran, 2020). According to Bandura (2006), an essential distinction about self-efficacy is that it measures teachers' perceived capabilities, not their intentions. In addition, Berg and Smith (2018) indicated that strong teacher efficacy beliefs for beginning teachers are associated with low teacher attrition rates.

Self-efficacy provides a lens to this research, and insight into special education teachers' self-efficacy beliefs is necessary to improve teacher preparation programs. Zhang et al. (2018) stated that "efficacy in teaching students with disabilities is vital for recruiting and retaining an adequate supply of teachers with high-quality teaching skills to teach students with disabilities" (p. 40). Therefore, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers need explicit learning methodologies and best practices for educating students with special needs, discussed in the sections below.

Gap in Literature and Concluding Remarks

In summary, this literature review provided a view into the existing literature on the theoretical frameworks of discreditation, and teacher self-efficacy. This chapter explicitly highlights the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and student outcomes, the disparities Black students with disabilities experience in special education, and the relevancy in preparing teachers to be culturally relevant.

Research between teacher self-efficacy and culturally relevant pedagogy within special education is still emerging. Limited qualitative inquiry is available on how special education teachers reflect on their teacher preparation program and ongoing in-service professional development as contributors to their self-efficacy to teach Black students with disabilities, a gap my research will address. It is crucial that teachers entering the field feel confident and equipped to educate the most vulnerable populations, who have been stigmatized and marginalized for centuries. Teachers must believe in the students they teach, understand their needs and culture from a historical and present perspective, and consciously address their biases before entering the classroom because there are profound implications for the students they encounter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) described qualitative research as an interpretive and naturalistic approach to a social and cultural phenomenon that includes practices that bring meaning to the people's social life. As stated by Mertler (2019), qualitative research design utilizes observations to gain knowledge and develop an understanding through the questions answered. There are several approaches to conducting qualitative research; however, this study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology. A narrative inquiry approach is a study of experience that allows participants to tell their stories used as data through written and oral accounts of their lived experience collaboratively as the researcher query and explore the experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertler, 2019).

Using a narrative research design for this study allowed special education teachers to tell their narrative of their preparedness to educate their Black students with disabilities. Through storytelling, teachers reflected on what they believed to be most beneficial and essential to their feelings of self-efficacy in the classroom. Teachers are valuable stakeholders within schools and exploring their voices through narrative inquiry lends a more profound understanding of what they value most and what contributed most to their preparation and self-efficacy as teachers.

The following chapter outlines the qualitative design methodology used in this study. This section includes the research purpose, worldview, research procedures, population sample, research questions, data collection, analysis, limitations, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and summary.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the stories and reflections of special education teachers as they identify their self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities based on their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training. The proposed study focused on the intersection of race and disability experiences in education, specifically being a Black student with disabilities receiving special education services in school.

This study is relevant and necessary as it provided insight into what learning experiences special education teachers identify as most relevant in contributing to their level of efficacy and preparedness in the special education classroom through their experiences. There is currently limited research examining special education teachers' reflections on their preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities. Intersecting identity markers such as being Black and disabled contribute to ways in which students can be both invisible and hyper visible in the classroom (Connor et al., 2016). It is critical to gather data through the research from special educators as they reflect on what components and experiences of their in-service training and teacher preparation program contribute to their self-efficacy to educate students with marginalized intersecting identities. It can lead to teacher education program enhancements and policy changes for educational leaders to improve practice. Most importantly, the findings can lead to improved postsecondary outcomes and educational experiences for Black students with disabilities.

Worldview

Worldview refers to "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p.17). Creswell and Creswell (2018) described worldview as the guiding principle for how a researcher conducts research, selects a research design, and formulates questions to gain knowledge influenced by their philosophical orientation of the world, research experience, and personal beliefs. Creswell

and Plano Clark (2018) describe a pragmatic worldview as it orients toward real-world practice and a problem-solving approach that focuses on the consequences of research, placing high importance on the questions asked within the study by using various types of data sources to inform the problems explored in a study. I embrace a pragmatic worldview, through which I will explore this research.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed pragmatic researchers' freedom of choice regarding methods, techniques, and procedures used in a study. Additionally, a pragmatic approach to the study seeks to explore the truth that works at the time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative narrative inquiry guided through the lens of a pragmatic approach is most efficient for exploring the research questions stated above through the theoretical lens of Bandura's (1977) teacher self-efficacy theory, critical race theory, and critical disability theory (discrit) (Connor et al., 2016).

Positionality

As a Caribbean-born immigrant who migrated to the United States at age 11, I have navigated through New York's public school system from grades 6 - 12. I became a naturalized citizen of the United States at the age of 27. I hold a bachelor's degree in psychology and minored in African and Puerto Rican studies. It was here in the United States that I began exploring the history of my Black identity as it related to the African American experience in the country where I now live. As I cherish my flavorful Caribbean background, it has contributed to my understanding and relevance of the inclusivity of Blackness across the diaspora.

I have since earned my master's degree in school psychology. I chose a career path that led me to be an educator in New York's public schools as a school psychologist, working primarily with Black students with disabilities. These experiences give me a unique lens through which I approach this research. After 22 years of working in predominantly Black and minority

neighborhoods, I have supported many students and families with disabilities with my prior experiences as a home care respite worker and a child protective specialist. I am passionate about helping students with intersecting identities, such as being Black and disabled, as they receive an education through the public school system.

As a school psychologist and a member of the Committee on Special Education, I play a significant role in the lives of students evaluated and recommended for special education services. Therefore, I must explore the stories told by teachers of their self-efficacy and preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities so that they can achieve postsecondary outcomes and be an asset to society in the future.

Although my role as an educator makes me an insider, since this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers through stories, it makes me an outsider.

Additionally, while the proposed research focuses on the intersections of race and disability of Black students receiving special education, I do not have first-hand experience within those categories, which further makes me an outsider. Throughout the research, I must be careful not to place assumptions or judgments based on my daily interactions with special education teachers and their teacher preparation programs.

Research Procedure

Site Selection and Participants

Participants for this study included six state-certified public school PreK – 8th grade special educators who work in urban communities in the United States. Teachers selected were selected based on convenience sampling and met the following categories: State certified special educators who teach Black students with disabilities in their initial year to their 5th year of teaching since graduating from a teacher preparation program; completed a teacher preparation program in-person, hybrid, or online; participated in a field service placement in a PreK-12

school (virtual and in-person). Special education teachers who taught and completed a teacher preparation program virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic also qualified as participants if they met the criteria for the previously mentioned categories. For this research, the race of the special education teachers is not a factor in determining their qualification to participate in the study. Instead, the research focused on special education teachers in their initial year of teaching through their fifth year of teaching and working with Black students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The goal of this study is to shed light on special education teachers' self-efficacy and preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities. The following research questions guide this study:

- Overarching: What stories do special education teachers tell when they describe their preparation for educating Black students with disabilities?
1. What learning experiences do special education teachers describe as most important for their preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?
 - A. What are the key stories participants tell when they describe their understanding of special education teacher learning experiences in preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?
 - B. What are the key stories participants tell to describe their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities?
 2. How are such stories demonstrating special education teachers' prior knowledge of race and disability in education?
 - A. How do the stories describe their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?
 - B. How do the stories of their prior knowledge influence their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?

Data Collection

After obtaining Institutional Review Board Approval (Appendix A), recruitment of prospective participants occurred through direct outreach to local principals, teachers, and local school communities to identify special education teachers with a maximum of five years of teaching experience. Further recruitment occurred through social media platforms such as Facebook groups, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Additional outreach occurred through teacher groups and teacher listservs. Once participants responded to the recruitment notifications, they received an introductory email describing the purpose of the study. They also received an informed consent form, with their rights and reasonable expectations for privacy and confidentiality, and instructions for participation.

Once the consent forms were signed and returned, participants narrated reflective stories through a journal writing prompt. The narrative essay participants wrote to their younger selves as student teachers served as a reflection of their teacher preparation program and ongoing inservice special education professional development training that prepared them to work with Black with disabilities. After completing the stories, participants engaged in one-on-one semistructured and open-ended interviews to further discuss and expand on the stories written via Zoom with the researcher. Lastly, I conducted two focus group interviews that I created. The groups were divided based on participant completion of the study. The first group included one third-grade teacher and two fifth grade teachers. The second focus group included three teachers with the most significant variation in teacher experiences. One teacher taught PreK, another taught fourth grade and the third worked in a Junior High School and taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Below is a description of the data collected from each participant.

Narrative Essay

Participants completed a narrative story through a reflective letter to their younger selves. The writing prompts included what teachers want their younger selves to know about teaching Black students with disabilities. Teachers discussed what they would change about their teacher preparation programs as they described the supports and experiences that prepared and contributed to their sense of self-efficacy. Lastly, teachers were asked to describe the parts of their preparation and training that best prepared them to work with Black students with disabilities receiving special education services (see Appendix B).

Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one between the participant and the researcher via Zoom. Participants completed brief demographic information at the onset of each interview (see Appendix C). The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to ask followup questions for participants to expand on their written responses (Mertler, 2019). The interview protocol included brief, straightforward questions. The questions inquired about special education teachers' backgrounds, why they went into teaching, and what prepared them to work with Black students in special education. Additionally, teachers were asked how their teacher preparation programs discussed issues of race, disabilities, and their level of self-efficacy to work with Black students with disabilities (see Appendix D).

Focus Group Interviews

Lastly, participants engaged in focus group discussions. The groups were decided upon by the researcher and based on participant completion. In the focus groups, participants engaged in open discussions as they discussed the future of teacher preparation programs, what they have learned from veteran special education teachers, suggestions to improve teacher training and experiences in education and future research (see Appendix E).

Analysis

Transcription of audio interview data was collected and transcribed through Rev.com recording and Zoom transcription. I used field memos to journal the process and write about discoveries and ideas after each participant completes their narrative letter and interview. The written transcripts were reviewed along with the audio recording simultaneously to ensure accuracy in the audible transcription.

I conducted the analysis through inductive methods, such that the information became points of analysis by the researcher (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As data was collected, the data analysis process also co-occurred. I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software Dedoose to develop codes and themes. As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), as the researcher collects each form, they should simultaneously analyze documents and interviews collected earlier. I conducted coding in two cycles. During the initial stages of collecting data, I implemented preliminary coding, such as in-vivo coding, open coding, descriptive and value coding. The second stage allowed me to further conceptualize all the data collected to analyze the patterns, and categorization of words or phrases reflecting commonalities and differences in the themes participants shared (Fraser, 2004). Strategies such as highlighting keywords, patterns, and documenting trends of participants' responses occurred throughout the initial and second coding cycles. Through coding methods, themes developed resulted from inductive coding.

Trustworthiness

To ensure validity and reliability, participants reviewed final recorded transcriptions and written samples to ensure the accuracy of their statements and triangulation to ensure the credibility of the data. The research was peer debriefed by other qualifying persons who are unbiased to enhance validity. I observed member feedback to ensure participant satisfaction

throughout the research. I protected and secured participants' data and personal information by using an alias to prevent the identification of the participants. Lastly, I informed participants that they could discontinue the study and remove themselves at any time.

Ethical Considerations

Potential ethical issues included conflicts of interest, such as the participants may have worked for the same school district in which I work. However, during the informed consent process, participants were informed that although we may work for the same organization, I am conducting an independent research study not affiliated with said education department. Throughout the research to reduce the risk of ethical issues and concerns, participants were informed that participating in the research is voluntary and that no one is under coercion or influence and could withdraw from the study at any time.

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry design, and participants included special education teachers in urban communities who teach Black students with disabilities. I obtained background information about the participants through the demographic data questionnaire. Participants engaged in a narrative writing prompt, in which they wrote a letter to their younger selves about their preparation and experiences in teaching Black students with disabilities. Participants then participated in one-to-one interviews with the researcher via Zoom and in focus groups with other participants to discuss and reflect on the study process.

The theoretical framework utilized in my research is teacher-self efficacy theory and disability critical race theory (discrit). A qualitative study approach is most efficient for gaining knowledge of special education teachers' feelings of preparedness, specifically to educate Black youths with disabilities. There is limited research on special education teachers' self-efficacy (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Incorporating the discrit theory as a framework in this study explained

how race and dis/ability intersect within classrooms across urban communities in the US. These results will provide practitioners and policymakers with information that allows them to serve Black students with disabilities better and increase opportunities for positive postsecondary outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Black students with disabilities and individuals from ethnically diverse backgrounds with varied socioeconomic status are disadvantaged when attempting to obtain an education. Disproportionality is merely a symptom of more significant inequities that have impacted Black students with disabilities (Blanchett, 2009). In the United States, racist and ableist ideologies exist within societal systems and in classrooms (Funk et al., 2018). Minimal research exists on special education teachers' self-efficacy related to their preparedness explicitly to teach Black students receiving special education services (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative to examine teacher narratives regarding their preparedness and self-efficacy to educate Black students with intersecting marginalized identities, such as Black and disabled. Guided by the research questions, the study examined the influence of teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service professional development as described through the narrative stories and reflections of special education teachers.

Research Questions

This qualitative narrative inquiry study was guided by the overarching question, "What stories do special education teachers tell when they describe their preparation for educating Black students with disabilities?" Sub questions included:

1. What learning experiences do special education teachers describe as most important for their preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?
 - A. What are the key stories participants tell when they describe their understanding of special education teachers' learning experiences in preparation for educating Black students with disabilities?

- B. What are the key stories participants tell to describe their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities?
2. How are such stories demonstrating special education teachers' prior knowledge of race and disability in education?
- A. How do the stories describe their ability to work with Black students with disabilities? B. How do the stories of their prior knowledge influence their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?

This chapter provides individual participant vignettes that represent their unique stories. It also provides an in-depth analysis of the current study data collection and findings through themes highlighting Special Education teachers' narratives about their preparedness to educate their Black students with disabilities. Teachers are valuable stakeholders within school communities, and exploring their voices through a narrative inquiry offers a profound understanding of what they describe as most important for their preparation to educate Black students with disabilities. This qualitative narrative inquiry leads through a pragmatic approach and the theoretical lens of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and disability studies and critical race theory (discrit) (Connor et al., 2016).

Participants Vignette

All six participants met the inclusion criteria for the study, which included the following: (1) state-certified special education teacher, (2) teach Black students with disabilities, (3) teach in an urban community in the United States, (4) teaching experience can range from public, private, or charter schools (5) must be in their initial to fifth year of teaching since graduating from a teacher preparation program (6) completed a teacher preparation program and field placement in-person or virtually. All participants chose pseudonyms to represent them in the study and ensure

confidentiality. Each participant was very thoughtful about the name they selected as their pseudonym identification. Additionally, each of the six participants completed the three-part data collection process required for this research, which included one-on-one interviews, narrative essays, and focus group interviews.

Below are six vignettes describing each participant, the setting of the one-on-one interview, the current teaching assignment, historical information about what led each participant to become a special education teacher, and a summary of the narrative essay they wrote to their younger selves as they reflected on their teacher preparation program and on-going in-service special education professional development training that prepared them to work with Black students with disabilities. These vignettes' descriptions of each participant provides insight into the individuals who committed themselves to the research and whose passion aims to foster the learning of Black students with disabilities in urban communities.

Sister Mary Clarence

After putting her children to bed, Sister Mary Clarence requested an interview at night. The interview took place via Zoom platform at night, and she opted to participate off-camera. At the time of the interview, Sister Mary Clarence was in her fifth month of teaching in a public school. When asked to choose a pseudonym, she pondered on a name and selected Sister Mary Clarence to reference the hit movie "Sister Act." She said, "I just want to do my work and be left alone, just like Sister Mary Clarence in the movie." During the demographic questionnaire, Sister Mary Clarence informed that she was in a special education self-contained small class setting, with a mixture of fourth and fifth-grade students three weeks ago. She expressed that before her placement in the self-contained setting, she was the special education teacher in a first-grade integrated co-teaching (ICT) classroom upon her hiring in November 2022. Sister Mary Clarence shared that she was the fourth teacher placed in that class since September 2022 after being given

two weeks' notice by the administration. Sister Mary Clarence has experience as a classroom paraprofessional and a head teacher in a daycare program working in urban communities supporting Black students with and without disabilities during her undergraduate studies.

When asked what led her to become a special education teacher, Sister Mary Clarence shared that she always wanted to become a teacher for as long as she could remember. Her recollection of her childhood summers included teaching her siblings and cousins whatever she had learned the previous year. Although encouraged to become a doctor by her father, Sister Mary Clarence stated that after following the path of pre-med in high school and disliking it. This was followed by life events, such as starting her own family of three kids, attending several schools before staying committed to one teacher preparation program she found that met her educational needs and expectations the most. She took advantage of the global COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which learning was virtual she completed her degree to become a certified special education teacher.

In her narrative essay to her younger self, Sister Mary Clarence began by referencing the excitement of finally finding a teacher preparation program that she believed prepared her to be a confident teacher in the classroom while comparing it to the other programs she enrolled in that lacked diversity and was unable to make connections with who she identified as and the type of teacher she wanted to become. As she transitioned to her day-to-day teaching experiences, Sister Mary Clarence asserted in her essay, "Forgive me for being the bearer of not-so-good news but...YOU WILL NOT BE READY!" As she continued to reflect on her experiences in the classroom, the challenges and sacrifices made to become a teacher, she encouraged her younger self by stating, "If this is something you still want, if this is all you ever wanted to be, I support you! Let's be great together." At the end of the one-on-one interview, Sister Mary Clarence shared that the essay writing activity was therapeutic.

Charles Bronson

The interview with Mr. Bronson occurred at night, and he opted to participate on camera via the Zoom platform. When asked to provide a pseudonym, he selected Charles Bronson, referring to the fact that it is the name of an actor typically in vigilante movies who goes after the bad guys. At the time of the interview, Mr. Bronson was in his first year of teaching as the special education teacher in a third grade ICT class in a public school. Mr. Bronson worked as a substitute teacher for one year before being hired full-time at a school.

When asked what led him to become a special education teacher, he shared that while he majored in psychology during his undergraduate due to his interest in understanding the human mind and a desire to work in human and helping services, he completed an internship at his local Boys and Girls Club. While there, he mentored a young man with Down Syndrome. He assisted him with his homework and the two played sports such as basketball. Mr. Bronson shared that children also find him to be a positive presence, and he enjoys working with children because he has the patience for it. Mr. Bronson shared that "It could be a lot at times, but ultimately, um, that is what I was meant to do." In his reflective narrative essay, Mr. Bronson discussed his experience completing his teacher preparation program virtually during the Covid-19 global pandemic. At the same time, he wished to be in person for his student teaching experience. Mr. Bronson attributes his prior experience in substitute teaching to significantly impact his preparation to teach Black students with disabilities as a full-time teacher.

Marco

The interview with Mr. Marco occurred in the evening, and he opted to participate off camera via the Zoom platform. When asked to provide a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality, he pondered for a few seconds before coming up with the name Marco, providing no specific

explanation for the chosen name. During the interview, Mr. Marco worked as a special education teacher of a self-contained small class fourth/fifth-grade public school as a leave replacement. Mr. Marco was in his first year of teaching Black students with disabilities.

When asked what led him to become a special education teacher, he shared that he received special education services from first – fifth grade, and teaching was a constant reoccurring thought for a career he should pursue. However, he talked himself out of it, indicating that he doubted his ability to be a good teacher. After pursuing a different career path after his undergraduate studies, Mr. Marco shared that he was unhappy with his career choice. After soul-searching, his desire for teaching became more meaningful as he thought about his teachers' impact on his life and how he hoped to have the same effect on students' lives.

In his reflective narrative essay, Mr. Marco told his younger self, "First let me tell you that you made it. Do not worry. All your hard work will pay off." He then encouraged his younger self to know that being an educator brings joy and challenges. Mr. Marco discussed the vital necessities of building self-efficacy, which include mentorship and support systems. He also identified specific aspects in which his teacher preparation program could have prepared him better to work with a "specific population."

Bob Mayer

Mr. Mayer's interview was conducted one summer evening on camera via Zoom. Mr. Mayer shared that he was in his second year of teaching and served as the special education ICT teacher in a public school for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Mr. Mayer is in his third year of teaching in an urban community, educating Black students with disabilities. During Mr. Mayer's interview, he shared that during his undergraduate studies, he majored in history, intending to pursue a career in the legal profession. However, after working for an insurance company, Mr. Mayer realized that he enjoyed educating families and interacting with children. As he

transitioned out of that career, his former middle school principal, who served as his mentor, encouraged him to pursue teaching. He added that his mentor advised him to choose special education as he "will never be out of a job" and teaching history is "pretty dry." Mr. Mayer added that the conversation ignited a spark. However, beyond the influence of his mentor Mr. Mayers shared that he received special education services as a child and outgrew the need for his IEP before high school and, in essence, stating, "I want to pay it forward and give back and provide opportunities for the students I teach."

In his narrative essay to his younger self, Mr. Mayer discussed how constant learning and adapting are essential as an educator. He also shared a brief excerpt from an assignment he completed during his teacher preparation program about skill building written two years ago, indicating that the task of the narrative essay sent him back to his email to retrieve the assignment. In the excerpt, Mr. Mayer reflected on his first time entering the field of education to the date of his last skill-building session within his program. He discussed all he knew, his growth in the program, and his excitement as he completed and was ready for the workforce. His essay then transitioned to the realities of his present position and the type of preparation needed for his role as a special education teacher educating Black students with disabilities. Mr. Mayer reflected on his teacher preparation program as it provided a "pleasant experience" that has "helped shape and mold" him into the teacher he is today.

Ms. Molly

Ms. Molly's interview occurred on a summer morning via Zoom platform, and she opted to participate off-camera. During the interview, birds chirped loudly, and her two-year-old daughter's voice was heard in the background interjecting to ask her questions at times, to which she took pauses to respond to her daughter. Ms. Molly is in her fifth year of teaching in a prekindergarten self-contained classroom. She explained that the students in her class have

disability classifications of preschoolers with a disability. However, few of them have received a medical diagnosis of autism. According to Ms. Molly, most of her students are “non-verbal.” When asked what led her to become a special education teacher, she shared that she always wanted to become one. However, she diverted toward the medical field of dentistry and felt unfulfilled in that career. As a result, Ms. Molly went back to school to obtain her undergraduate degree in early childhood education. She shared that while in the program, during one assessment course, she was required to administer the Ages and Stages questionnaire, which she conducted with her nephew. Ms. Molly could then identify "red flags" early as he was not meeting some of the developmental milestones. Ms. Molly stated that after the class, she decided to concentrate on becoming a special education teacher, which she pursued during her graduate studies.

Ms. Molly's reflective narrative essay to her younger self was brief, as she asserted that her teacher's preparation program "was one of the best and you will be supported throughout your preparation." However, she informed her younger self that there are challenges to teaching that textbooks do not prepare students for. Although she trusts that the teacher preparation program prepared her to become an excellent special education teacher, it requires "a few tweaks and a broader view on demographics." Ms. Molly stated:

The experience that is lacking, which will be shocking when you enter the field, is in the classroom of lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Schools that have little to no funding where the majority of the students are Black and Brown or migrants.

Jenna

Jenna's interview occurred early one summer morning via the Zoom platform on camera. She requested an early morning interview, as she said it was the only available time before her kids woke up. Jenna is in her third year as a special education teacher in an ICT classroom in a

public school. When asked what led her to become a special education teacher, Jenna shared that she originally intended to become a lawyer but always had a passion for teaching. After working at an afterschool program, she realized that students would benefit from her direct help in the classroom now than in the legal aspect of education. After applying to graduate school for education, Jenna shared that one of her professors encouraged her entire class to pursue special education, and it was just a few additional credits.

In her narrative essay to her younger self, Jenna reflected on the preparation she received to become a teacher, indicating the following:

I felt I had a well-rounded education, and I was equipped with the tools to prepare me for the classroom. It was not until I started teaching, I realized that the training I received was not a perfect fit for the African American community. I knew there was more learning I needed to do.

Through her reflective essay, Jenna discussed the discrepancy between her teacher preparation, student teaching experience, and in-service classroom experiences while reflecting on the impact COVID-19 had on her first year of teaching. Jenna highlighted her goals, aligning with her purpose for helping African American students "realize their potential, identify their strengths, improve their weaknesses, and achieve their goals." She also acknowledged the benefits of having a mentor who worked within the African American community who helped mold her and helped her bring balance to the real-world experiences of the classroom and the textbook tools she learned in school.

Findings

The findings of this study addressed the research problem, which sought to understand special education teachers' self-efficacy and preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities since minimal research exists on the topic (Chu & Garcia, 2014). We do not know

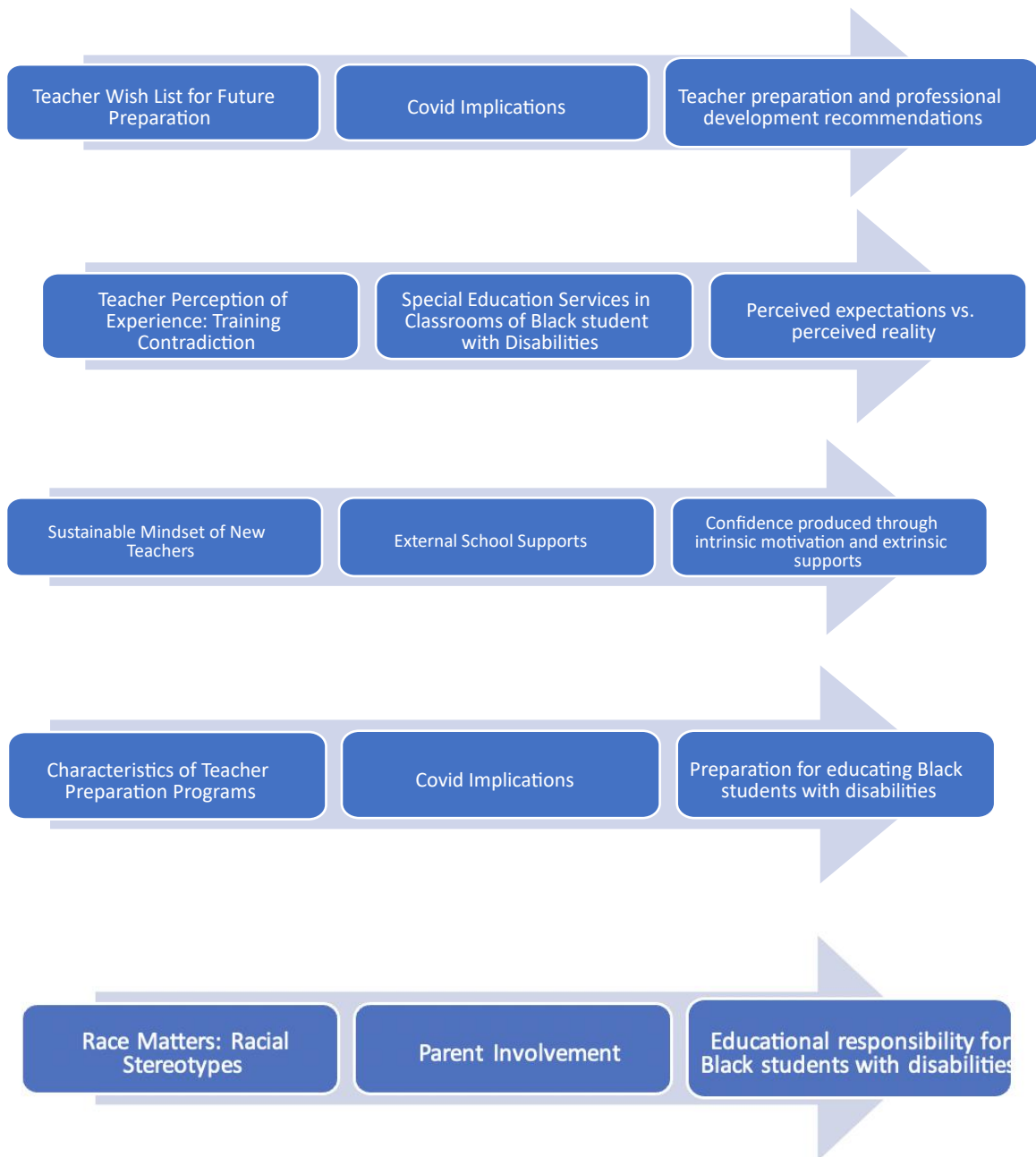
how prepared and confident teachers are to educate Black students with marginalized identities, such as being Black and disabled. However, by exploring teacher narratives in this research study, participants reflected on their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service professional development that revealed stories that answer the research questions explored.

The analysis conducted through inductive methods garnered information that became points of analysis by the researcher (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analysis process concurrent with data collection. I implemented preliminary coding, such as *in vivo*, open-coding, value, and descriptive coding, during the initial stages of collecting data. During primary coding, I reviewed each participant's interview and hand-coded using strategies such as highlighting keyword patterns and documenting trends of the participants' responses. Further inductive coding methods occurred through Dedoose, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

Coding occurred in two coding cycles. The primary cycle of coding yielded 56 codes. During the second stage, the researcher listed and categorized all codes, resulting in nine categories. This technique allowed the researcher to conceptualize further all the data collected to analyze the patterns and categorization of words or phrases reflecting commonalities and differences in the themes participants shared (Fraser, 2004). From these nine categories, five themes emerged that cut across all research questions. These themes included: 1.) Teacher preparation and professional development recommendations 2.) Perceived expectations vs. perceived reality 3.) Confidence produced through intrinsic motivation and extrinsic supports 4.) Preparation for educating Black students with disabilities 5.) Educational responsibility for Black students with disabilities. See Figure 1 for a visual of the code categories from the interviews transformed into themes.

Figure 1

Categories Transformed to Themes



Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Recommendations

The first finding of this study focused on the participants' recommendations for improved teacher preparation and in-service training. Participants desired teacher training programs and experiences that had a proactive emphasis on racial and disability diversity both at their university/college and in their student-teaching classroom experiences. Finding one addressed the overarching research question: What learning experiences do special education teachers describe as most important for their preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?

Upon reflection of their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training, participants reimagined teacher preparation programs to include the following: a need for a diverse group of professors within their programs, student teaching opportunities that offer racially diverse experiences, rotating student teaching opportunities, a cultural component requirement in teacher preparation, as well as a course on understanding family/child dynamics and teacher-parent relationships specifically in communities of color. Blanchett (2006) asserted that addressing the persistent problem of disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education should focus on better preparing teachers to address the needs of ethnically diverse student populations. Participants of this study expressed that exposure to diverse experiences would have better prepared them to work in classrooms with Black students with disabilities.

Diversity Wishlist

Marco shared his thoughts on the need for a diverse teacher educator staff within teacher preparation programs,

I feel like a lot of the teachers, I don't wanna say didn't have experience with Black students, but it, it seemed like a lot of them didn't really have a lot of anecdotal stories talking about them. And I feel like if you could get a more diverse group of teachers that

may help the success of working with, um, Black students with disabilities and just like, by success, I mean getting to learn, getting to get their grades up from what they are, just having some sort of impact on them in a positive way. I definitely feel like you need to get a more diverse, um, set of teachers and mentors.

Although Marco expressed that he learned about critical race theory in his first semester at college, he was not privy to the fact that some schools had more resources than others. He expressed that working in a low-income school opened his eyes to that reality, while where he student taught, resources were abundant. He shared that he wished his school had prepared him for classrooms with limited resources.

Additionally, Marco and several other participants expressed that diversity in teacher educator staff would have exposed them to a different cultural component and anecdotal references that would have exposed them to working in classrooms of Black students. When asked if her program included an urban strand, Jenna shared that her African American professors attempted to incorporate discussions related to the experiences of Black students rather than White professors. Love (2019) asserted that teachers from all backgrounds graduate from teacher preparation programs without studying the history and culture of the students they teach. In the participants' descriptions of the diverse experiences, they desired it not to imply that non-Black educators did not have anecdotal stories relating to teaching Black students with disabilities.

Based on the participants' experiences in this study, they shared that their experiences lacked racial diversity in teacher educator faculty and staff and the anecdotes provided based on the education spaces in which they taught and related to their students. Institutions of higher learning contribute to the complicit creation of racial inequities in K-12 schools, as the academy of higher learning for centuries centered on Whiteness and curriculum has been primarily

centered on Eurocentric ideologies and the ideas of White males in academia and including only a small group of women and individuals from marginalized communities (Au et al., 2016; Patton, 2016).

Participants identified the need for rotating student teaching opportunities to allow teachers to work with diverse students with disabilities from different backgrounds. Based on the interest of this study, the participants specifically identified the need to work in urban areas with Black students with disabilities to prepare new teachers better. Bob Mayer stated:

Programs need to be based in predominantly Black communities. Cause it's one thing to like talk the talk and lecture to student teachers about how to teach in those communities, but the, the realistic experience and the quickest way to learn is to be immersed in those communities and to learn as they're going.

Bob Mayer suggested that teacher preparation programs partner with local organizations focusing on race and community matters. He expressed that student teachers should be encouraged to attend the organization's meetings to gain experience and knowledge outside their jobs to help new teachers grow and develop as professionals. Bob Mayer shared that through his school experience, many teachers leave in their cars immediately after school without engaging or having connections to their work communities. He indicated that the practice needs to change.

During the second focus group interview, a participant shared that a teacher must be prepared to teach in any community upon completing a program. They stated that teacher preparation programs should ensure that teachers understand various cultures. The participant suggested that preparation programs should have class trips to schools in low socioeconomic communities, and student teachers' should research the demographic population of school districts, migrants, and multilingual students. The participant further stated that preparation programs should prepare student teachers for what real classrooms look like, not only the ability

to teach from the experience of a textbook. Essentially, the participants identified a distinct difference between the communities for they student taught to the communities where they teach, one of which they were lacking training. Love (2019) discussed the need for teachers to have the background knowledge of the communities they teach to be change agents in the patterns of inequity in established educational settings.

Jenna and Molly shared that more opportunities to observe various classrooms during teacher preparation would be beneficial. Molly shared that more exposure to African American communities by going into the field, watching classes, and returning to classes to discuss and compare notes would be helpful. She stated that those opportunities would allow new teachers to see how students in special education teachers worked with those students. Jenna stated, "Not working with the population makes you a little unrelatable or gives you a shock at first. It gives you a little pushback to ask, like, how are you really to handle this?"

Molly expressed similar sentiments as she indicated that programs should send student teachers to schools where they can get the raw version of what occurs in urban schools. She reflected on her experience observing an African American boy from an upper-middle class family compared to where she worked currently, where parents barely responded to progress reports. Molly expressed that those experiences early in a teacher's career are needed and make one better prepared. Molly also indicated the need for programs to design a course that allows in-service teachers to speak to parents, understand the importance of culture, and understand the mindset of parents.

Exposure to Various Disability Categories

During the second focus group interview, participants shared that teacher preparation programs should include diversity in the way they teach, such as students should research topics and do presentations on different scenarios related to race and education. Participants

unanimously agreed that they need to be exposed to all students to become teachers as they learn about all the educational disability classifications and how best to meet students' needs. Molly shared that before specializing in birth – second-grade special education, she observed a preschool classroom, elementary, middle, and high school. She expressed that the same thing must occur to allow student teachers observations in classrooms with various disability needs and classifications. Participants said that being granted opportunities to observe and work with students with a wide range of disabilities raises awareness that there is not just one type of disability, which will allow new teachers to be better prepared, knowing that there is a possibility they can teach students with varying needs when in the workplace.

Participants also expressed that being exposed to different settings throughout teacher preparation training before committing to a specific grade for licensing will also allow student teachers to build on students' strengths while training and not to look at them through the lens of their disability and what they are unable to do. Participants referenced the need to integrate textbook knowledge with practical experience, such that learning about disabilities in the textbook while actively working alongside students in those disability categories prepares new special education for the field.

Molly expressed that she would design a class in the teacher preparation program to include a course with a component that involves student teachers speaking with parents to understand a child's environment and support at home to understand the child better and the parent mindset. Molly further alluded that student teachers would observe students' behaviors and mannerisms to determine how their disability impacts learning and their ability to navigate the classroom environment. Student teachers would then be tasked with sharing stories about what strategies and support they believe would help the student. Molly stated that student teachers should be allowed to implement these strategies and supports, then discuss whether they

worked and adapt the supports frequently to meet the student's needs appropriately. Molly shared that those are things she learned on her own, stating:

That's basically what I had to do on my own. I had to understand the home. I had to understand the students themselves, each of them and their disabilities and then work with them. Find a way that I can work with them that is suitable for them, with their parents and parents' understanding in mind.

Molly shared that being equipped with these tools will help new teachers in the field relate and build relationships with parents. Charles Bronson echoed what Jenna and Molly shared, indicating that programs should address more family-orientated things, such as on-going family communication since teachers must engage with parents often.

Reimagining In-Service Training

When asked about the supports current in-service training provided in supporting new teachers to educate Black students with disabilities, Sister Mary Clarence stated:

My school didn't really have like special education support period, so forget new teacher support. My mentor periods were my prep periods, so I didn't have time in school and it was to support teachers in what they were doing. And it, I just feel like if we had a time with special education, teachers could come together or new teachers could come together and just support one another to know if they are going in the right direction. And, you know, just have other colleagues they can talk to, to bounce off to see if what they are doing is going to make a difference in those students they have.

During the first focus group interview, participants shared that they would like more opportunities to collaborate with teachers who previously worked with their students, either before work, during work, after work, or at the beginning of the school year, specifically to discuss the student's interests, learning needs, and to discuss what worked in the classroom with

students in the year prior. Marco described this as a "crash course" on learning the students. Marco also suggested that school communities invite previous students who received special education services to return to their elementary schools and discuss progress on their lives and offer advice to the students and teachers in the classroom. He shared that since he was a student diagnosed with a disability and is now a classroom teacher, he believes that if students and teachers hear stories from adults who previously had IEPs, it will change their mindset toward learning and teaching.

As a collective, participants expressed that professional development during in-service training has been generalized and geared towards curriculum, data, reading strategies, and some behavior training. In one instance, Charles Bronson shared that his principal encourages teachers to attend professional development outside the school building. He shared that he participated in a training on Therapeutic Crisis Intervention System Schools (TCIS), which teaches staff a trauma-sensitive approach to teaching students how to cope while creating a safe environment during a crisis (TCIS, 2021). Charles Bronson expressed that teacher preparation programs and more school professional development should include training such as TCIS to help them learn strategies to better work with students. All other participants shared that professional development is often not specifically for special education, nor does it specifically address support for working with Black students with disabilities. Overall, for both teacher in-service training and teacher preparation, participants expressed that it would be beneficial to learn proactive strategies to support students with the tools and resources to manage the situation during a crisis.

Desired Future of Teacher Training

When asked to imagine the future of teacher preparation, participants shared that we are now in a digital world. As such, teacher preparation needs to increase the inclusion of technology

and prepare teachers for a technological world. The COVID-19 pandemic directly affected each participant. They were either completing coursework for teacher preparation, student teaching, or new teachers in their classrooms and pushed to adapt to a new way of teaching and learning. A few key points discussed by participants related to COVID-19 and technology were that student teaching opportunities should be in person, not engaging entirely online. Teaching young learners online was challenging and further hindered the learning of students with disabilities.

Although remote instruction was challenging, incorporating technology such as games, applications, and videos, in-person or remotely, helped engage students of all age groups. Bob Mayer shared that he found:

The COVID pandemic to be a blessing in disguise because in the midst of student teaching for the collaborative, I was thrown in, or well, like the whole system was thrown into remote learning. So, and with that analogy of flying the plane as it's being built, I kind of had that experience as a student teacher.

Jenna shared the following:

I started the year in a classroom and ended the year remotely. Ready for the challenge presented ahead. I prepared learning materials for the students to take home ensured that students and parents that we were going to continue their education remotely and that we are going to get through this period of shut down together. No one could have prepared us for the pandemic that we went through. Being a teacher, we had to learn to be creative and to think quickly on our feet. With the last two years, and living through a pandemic, it has become clear that teachers need to be innovate.

Jenna expressed gratitude to her teacher preparation program for introducing students to technology, applications, and various resources to keep students engaged. She shared that when the school system went remote, she realized that many veteran teachers had considerable

navigating programs needed to continue teaching. Jenna said that she supported veteran teachers in learning various programs so that learning was consistent. Jenna and Bob Mayer alluded that today's teachers now exist in a post-pandemic world where education can be delivered in-person, online, or through hybrid measures. As such, it requires teachers to be innovative and engaging.

During the focus group interviews, participants shared that the future of teacher preparation programs must include and encourage the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Bob Mayer and Marco shared that teachers must know technology, its features, and its abilities. They believe that students are well-versed in technology. Instead of the education system trying to deter the use of technology or even AI in the classroom, preparation programs should train teachers on how to use it, how to monitor the use of it in classrooms, and how to use it to support students' learning. Participants agreed that AI can support student learning if used in school, especially for students with disabilities. As stated by a participant during the focus group, "AI's gonna change, future change, um, teaching for both teachers and students within the next five to 10 years. Cuz that's coming. So, we need to be ready for it." Participants recommend that teacher preparation programs need to do a lot of research into AI and spend time understanding it since it is a new technology to prepare teachers for it. Marco shared that AI:

Could open a huge door in terms of just being of assistance to students with Disabilities.

Like in the same way that like back in the day, text to speech suddenly became a great way for nonverbal students to respond.

Participants believe that teacher preparation programs should have one or two courses devoted to experimenting with new technology and applying it specifically to special education, which will allow student teachers to access and discover ways to differentiate and find support needed for students with disabilities. When asked if participants could think of ways technology could support Black students with disabilities, most participants shared that they did not know how it

could help students specifically by race. Still, they were sure that would benefit all students with disabilities. However, Jenna shared that when teaching her Black students with and without disabilities, she uses an online vocabulary game that helps her students create rap while building their vocabulary. She also includes movement activities through Minecraft games in her classroom. Jenna shared that it increases engagement and student participation. The participants' responses above support the statement that, "teachers should be required to study culture" (Love, 2019, p.128). Teacher pedagogical practices must intentionally adapt the curriculum with technological advancements while teaching and centering learning experiences around students' cultural needs and interests.

Perceived Expectations vs. Perceived Reality

The second finding of this study focused on the stories participants revealed about their perceived expectations for the classroom based on their teacher preparation and student teaching opportunities compared to their perceived reality of teaching in classrooms of Black students with disabilities. Finding #2 addressed the research questions: What are the key stories participants tell when they describe their understanding of special education teacher learning experiences in preparation for educating Black students with disabilities? Marco's expressed the following,

So, the population was different. Um, resources were different. And even, I'd say attitudes among the students themselves, just in terms of, I don't wanna say wanting to learn, but their approach towards learning was different also. Okay. It was, again, I don't wanna use the word easier, but [laugh], it was, um, they were more motivated. I guess. They were able to stay on track more.

"It's different!" and "apples to oranges" were the consistent terms echoed throughout participant interviews when asked how their student teaching experience compared to their first

few years or first year of teaching. Different was used to describe the discrepancy between what they learned in school, "textbook theory," and the realities of being in their own classroom "practice." Differences discussed also included the difference in physical location, demographic population of students served, student attitude towards learning, school structure/supports, resources/technology available at schools, and parent engagement and feedback.

Jenna shared her experience as a newly hired teacher in an urban school district:

But when, I, um, got my first teaching job, it was in XXX and the resources were nonexistent, you had to like come and do your own. That principal, I don't know if it was lack of knowledge much more or if it was more so, um, lack of resources, didn't have much coaches coming in, didn't have much of any resources available incoming teaching or already established teacher that were in the building.

Throughout Jenna's interview, she described how her first year of teaching compared to her student teaching experience. She shared that there were many supports and access to technology during student teaching. Jenna prided herself on being able to use technology at a time when the world became digital due to the pandemic. She acknowledged that her program prepared her with the tools to navigate technology to engage students remotely or in person. However, during her first teaching assignment, the lack of resources and teacher support, such as an IEP coach who guided new teachers on writing IEPs, was unavailable, which made her transition into the classroom difficult. Prior research indicates that new teachers often report feeling prepared to create lesson plans and less ready with the skills necessary to build relationships with students and their families while expressing incongruencies in their teacher preparation and in-service teaching abilities (Doran, 2020; Smeaton & Waters, 2013).

Molly, who was highly impressed by the sensory playground at the school she student taught, expressed disappointment when describing the playground at the school where she worked, stating:

The classroom, the playground is an ordinary playground with I think a place that's not felt developmentally appropriate for preschoolers, not just even general education preschoolers, um, or preschoolers with a disability. I think it's still a little bit too high and hard for general ed kids. Okay. Preschoolers, we, we are thinking preschoolers, not kindergarten, first grade, second graders. It would be fine for those kids, but, uh preschoolers, no. They need constant watch on it because yea. someone can get hurt. Molly works with preschool students, some of whom are diagnosed with autism or developmental delays and are nonverbal. Her recognition of the difference in the playground available for students to play in stands out because it is a valued observation that was memorable in her student teaching compared to where she currently works. Molly shared the comparison of students accessing augmented devices to communicate their needs. In contrast, augmented communication devices are not accessible to her students, resulting in the adults in the classroom doing most of the talking for them. She shared that her students usually point to communicate, and the speech teachers provide a picture communication chart to help students communicate. Molly expressed that during her student teaching, teachers worked explicitly on students' IEP goals during a specific time of the day. A token economy ensured that students were praised and received positive reinforcement when progressing toward their goals. In contrast, Molly shared that there is no time in her workday to work on each student goals specifically. Instead, she must target student goals while trying to teach the curriculum, which is developmentally beyond what her students can do. Molly reflected on the number of resources available at the school where she completed her student teaching and expressed that now she

spends her own money to provide things needed to enhance her lessons to meet students' needs in her classroom.

Jenna shared that during her student teaching observations, she was placed in:

Affluent communities where they had more resources and the class sizes were a little bit more tailored, smaller and the parents were very much involved. Okay. So it, it's, it's different. You see a little bit of difference between the both.

Participants expressed that what they observed and learned during student teaching differs from their school placement in that teachers must constantly adapt to the resources available within their school communities. Access to technology was also a consistent notion shared amongst participants. They noted that having smart boards that do not work or borrowing tables/laptops from their fellow staff members was the norm in their school settings compared to student teaching when each student often had their device. Santa Maria (2009) highlighted how technology further contributes to educational inequities as she described how low-income students experience technology differently than their more affluent peers. Students in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to use computers in large lab settings, have devices monitored, may become hyper-focused on the use of technology, and are more frustrated with academics (Gorski, 2003; Santa Maria, 2009).

In-Service Reality and Classroom Challenges

The study participants discussed the administration's impact on a new teacher's experience within the school building, indicating that excellent and supportive administration can contribute to higher learning outcomes and that the opposite is just as impactful. As stated by Jenna:

I found that the culture in school, well, what the principal at the time I was teaching didn't believe in, like phonics didn't believe in like the small group to like really target

the kids to what they needed. So, if she would come in and then to do an observation and you're not doing the lesson that she asked for, you are automatically ineffective.

Sister Mary Clarence expressed frustrations about attempting to follow the curriculum yet getting different directives from the administration, who told her only to cover specific lessons. She stated, "They give you a calendar like they micromanage every bit of your time [laughs]." Stories told by participants about their interactions with curriculum and administration in their school settings are highlighted as they reflect and describe how their experiences differed in teacher preparation compared to their day-to-day encounters of educating Black students with disabilities, impacted by school structure and administrators' expectations.

Participants discussed how teaching in urban communities observed that many students are not referred early for an IEP; for many the referral comes later in their school career. Sister Mary Clarence shared how one of her fifth-grade students read on a kindergarten level and struggled to retain information. She expressed concerns about the student while reflecting on the child's future, knowing that the school could not meet her needs. Sister Mary Clarence shared that the student required a specialized program to target her areas of need. During the focus group interviews, participants shared how many students with severe conditions are being encouraged to stay within the district for inclusion; however, without the necessary support to meet the needs of the children, participants believe that it would not benefit the students. When asked about the difference between their preparation and the preparation of special education teachers who work with students with severe disabilities, they indicated that those teachers may have had the student-teacher experiences that better prepared them for the population or were exposed to students with severe needs and receive appropriate training and support. They exclaimed that many supports, such as extra paraprofessional support, are not provided within general education classrooms and not within under-resourced urban communities.

Time management, structuring lessons, engaging students, collaborating with parents, parent pushback, lack of resources, working on student IEP goals, working with inefficient technology, over-planning lessons, administrative pushback, and lack of planning time with other teachers are noted classroom-challenges encountered by participants in day to day in supporting Black students with disabilities in their current school placements.

Prior Experience Teaching Black Students

Participants described prior teaching experiences they had with Black students. Sister Mary Clarence had the lengthiest history of working with Black students before becoming a classroom teacher. She shared that during her undergraduate studies, she worked at a daycare in an urban community that catered to children as early as six weeks of age. According to Sister Mary Clarence, many parents were nurses who worked 12-hour shifts, doctors, and lawyers who needed childcare services for their children. She described that while taking a few educational courses at her college, one of her professors shared anecdotes that she could not connect with due to her experiences at the daycare. According to Sister Mary Clarence, when she expressed what she observed or practiced at the daycare, her professor often informed her that she was wrong and that the teachers at the daycare were not teaching students in a developmentally appropriate manner. Sister Mary Clarence stated:

So, in my undergrad, um, in my undergrad program, I was enrolled in the teaching program there. And I felt that what I thought I knew about education and what I saw, I worked at a daycare for over 12 years. And, um, I was promoted from, you know, you don't need a degree to work in a daycare, but you know, they, once you see potential, they'll have you as a head teacher. And the things I was learning to teach African American students there at such a young age, I would take those experiences and go back to my professor and she couldn't connect my experience because her stories were about,

um, her being able to sit on her grandmother's lap while her grandmother read her stories.

Half my kids don't. Grandparents are still working. They don't have their parent to sit on their lap.

Sister Mary Clarence continued to describe her thoughts on disability labels African American students received, which she described are often due to deficiencies in lack of exposure and not having early experiences such as being able to sit on their grandmother's lap because their grandparents are still working. However, she indicated that the teachers diligently attempted to expose the children to early learning of their letters and numbers at the daycare where African Americans operated with primarily African American students. Sister Mary Clarence shared that although the parents did not have time to sit and read with their children many nights, she knew they loved them. Although the love and nurturing looked different from how her professor described, her professor could not make connections that the children were benefiting from how the daycare staff taught students. Black students and families of color have encountered numerous obstacles and challenges in education throughout the history of the United States and transforming practices to include parental involvement in teacher assignments for each student is necessary to foster empowerment within these communities. Families of color require navigation to maneuver unfamiliar systems, particularly the education system which historically has not been a place that has provided equal opportunities for them. The current educational system requires a mandated shift in policy to include minority parents and those from low socioeconomic status to be active participants and have their voices heard in the decision-making process of their children.

According to Love (2019), the community cultural wealth theory identifies the significance of cultural capital for communities of color who live on the margins of society and how they are empowered. Community cultural wealth theory includes six cultural capital aspects:

aspirational, linguistic, familial, social capital, navigational, and resistance. Aspirational describes an individual's hopes and dreams despite countless barriers. Social capital describes individuals using their networks to gain access to spaces that have been inaccessible to them before. Schools must create policies that require parents, teachers, and educators to work together in partnership to build social capital for the benefit of all students, regardless of race and class. Trainor (2010) described the need for teachers to understand parents' acquisition and use of capital since home-school collaboration ranges widely across and within family structures due to differences in social capital and cultural influences.

Teacher Reflections

Participants were surprised about the vast difference between their expectations and the reality of teaching. As they reflected on the overall experiences, teachers identified the disconnection between the spaces and educational classrooms for student teaching and the realities of teaching Black students with disabilities in Urban Schools. Participants reported feeling under-prepared to serve Black students with disabilities due to their lack of exposure during student teaching. Also, participants shared that while exposed to school communities with accessible technology and various supports such as mentors and coaches, adapting to schools lacking technology and resources was an eye-opener. Marco expressed these sentiments and wished his preparation program prepared him for an under-resourced classroom. As Sister Mary Clarence reflected on her role as a Special Education teacher educating Black students, she stated, "It's not the students. The job stifles your creativity to do what you need to do for them." Black people in America face barriers daily that hinder access to financial freedom, quality education, and success in life. Racism impacts multiple systems at the institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and individual levels; it has also produced and nurtured systems of inequality (Funk et al., 2018). Within the education system, "both students placed in special education and

those who attend urban schools have a long history of being miseducated, undereducated, and treated inequitably by the American educational system" (Blanchett, 2009, p. 370).

Participants in the study expressed their daily realities of teaching Black students in urban communities and the challenges they experience to access resources that can enhance student learning and prepare them to compete in a global society. However, the challenges discussed are evidence of the systemic inequities present in the education system for classrooms of Black and disabled students.

Confidence Produced through Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Supports

The third finding of this study addressed how intrinsic motivation and extrinsic supports have sustained and strengthened their self-efficacy and confidence in the classroom. Finding #3 answered the research question: What are the key stories participants tell to describe their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities? A teacher's self-efficacy plays a role in motivation and influences students' academic outcomes and achievements. As such, the stories teachers shared about the factors contributing to their self-efficacy are enlightening regarding their ability to educate Black students with disabilities.

Sustainable Mindset of New Teachers

Intrinsic motivation is doing something on your own will (Reiss, 2012). Participants in this study described their internalized thoughts, beliefs, and personal desires as mantras throughout this section of the study analysis, contributing to their self-efficacy in the classroom. Participants described these narratives through factors that motivate them and why they persevere in teaching while building resiliency and self-determination.

Participants reflected on their thoughts and words as described the factors contributing to their sustainable mindsets and resiliency. Marco believed he could be a great teacher, stating, "I know I can handle it! Even if I make a mistake, I know I can do it." Bob Mayer expressed that

relative to the day-to-day teaching processes, "All in all, I am proud of the work I have done, but there is always room for improvement and growth." In Sister Mary Clarence's narrative essay, she encouraged her younger, stating, "If this is something you still want, if this is all you ever wanted to be, I support you! Let's be great together." These phrases shared by participants captured the essence of what sustains them daily to show up and work for the students in their community, the Black students with disabilities, and all other student populations that they serve. At the end of the first focus group interview, Sister Mary Clarence offered a word of encouragement to her fellow research participants as she expressed:

I just wanted to say we all survived our first year and that maybe all we all Continue to grow. Yes, in our profession, and you know, don't lose sight of why, why we decided to become teachers in the first place.

Sister Mary Clarence's statement above describes her "Why." Understanding teachers' Why' provided insight into what brought them to education and helped deconstruct each teacher's identity, purpose, and passion for the teaching profession, which they all love. Sister Mary Clarence described that she always wanted to become a teacher. However, due to life events during the COVID-19 pandemic, she pursued her passion for teaching by taking advantage of the remote option to complete her studies. Charles Bronson shared that he sought teaching due to his love of helping others and an innate instinct to work well with children. Marco shared that as a child, he received special education services, and although he always had a desire to be a teacher, he took a different career path. While unfulfilled, he pursued his actual passion for teaching.

Marco also hopes to have the same positive impact his teachers had on his life with the students in his classroom. Bob Mayer was encouraged by a mentor to pursue teaching special education, and with his love for history and passion for helping people, as a former special education student, he expressed that he wants to pay it forward and reciprocate his love for

learning to other students. Ms. Molly shared that she always wanted to teach, and after pursuing dentistry, her passion for teaching remained. When Ms. Molly decided to take courses toward her education degree, she identified early red flags in her nephew's developmental milestones, contributing to him gaining access to early intervention services. Since then, Molly fell in love with working with the preschool special education population. Jenna shared that she was always interested in education. However, she planned to pursue the legal aspect of supporting families until she began working at an after school where she realized that students needed her more in the classroom. Jenna praised her mentor for encouraging her to pursue a Special Education degree.

Participants also shared their desires to pursue teaching, including wanting to make sure that kids were on the right path and the desire to inspire students to succeed. Marco shared that he wants to tell his story and tell his students that he was a student who received special education services and tell them now, "I am your teacher." Additional factors contributing to participants' motivation are observing students' growth and progress. As stated by Jenna: Like just seeing the growth that the student will show you and just learning patience and just knowing that, um, day-to-day is like, okay we could set up this lesson up today, but it may not happen due to some type of emotion or some type of distraction that happened. But just be gentle on yourself and be gentle on the students as well to know that, um, that there's gonna be growth. Growth does take some time. There are some, um, students who

you see growth quicker than other, but just keep that in mind that there is going to be growth. Even if it is as small as saying hi, you know, that starts with okay in the beginning of the year that they didn't say it. So just knowing that once you walk in, you're gonna make a difference. There will be a difference. That's me. As long as you have your heart set in the right place, you will see a difference.

Molly shared similar sentiments as she described factors that will encourage new teachers for teaching, she expressed:

The rewards of seeing progress in the students and knowing that a child who came in not knowing how to say hi to one another or request anything, and by two, three weeks of working with them they start by making a gesture. And then a simple word repeating, saying something. Um, so I just think the progress of each child and to see their growth.

Participants Jenna and Bob Mayer discussed participation in activities beyond the daily duties of teaching in a classroom to build relationships with students and engage with families.

Bob Mayer shared that he is a member of a Black organization that centers around the educational success of Black students. Bob Mayer shared that although not Black, emerging himself in his students' culture and being a part of something that will improve their lived experience is his passion. He shared that he is on the curriculum committee of the organization that created a research-based curriculum for Black students already piloted in a few school districts. Bob Mayer is also pursuing his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction. Bob Mayer asserted that his involvement in the organization is an effective form of preparation for working with the Black students he teaches daily. During his interviews, Bob Mayer expressed that teacher preparation and school staff members should be a part of or know the happenings within their work community. It will contribute to relationship-building with students and their families.

Jenna shared that her school hosts frequent information sessions for parents. She expressed that through parent outreach, families come to the school on Saturday, where she participates in sessions to discuss what learning looks like in the school community. The curriculum is explained to parents to help them understand the programs and supports available at the school. Participants Jenna and Bob Mayer desire to meaningfully connect with families by voluntarily engaging in out-of-classroom activities out of their own will and due to their passion

to support the students and families they teach. Kafele (2009) asserted that to build solid relationships with students, educators must show that they are genuinely interested in students' growth and well-being in the classroom and beyond.

Extrinsic Supports

Fostering relationships with colleagues and parents, mentor support, veteran teachers' advice to new teachers, the ability to seek resources in the school community, and teacher collaboration were all external supports and key factors teachers expressed that contribute to their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities. Participants shared stories that building relationships with fellow special education department teachers who support and guide new teachers with IEP writing is essential. One participant shared during the second focus group interview that as a special education teacher since the IEP is a legal document, it helps when you can go to a colleague to review the document as a measure to serve students in the best manner possible. Building a relationship with students in the classroom and creating a nurturing and welcoming environment helps Jenna with her daily lessons. She shared that when her students are happy to see her, she can pour more into them. Jenna said that she constantly tries to reinvent new ways to keep her students engaged when introducing new lessons, whether math or phonics, she includes music and dancing. In addition, Jenna shared that building community leads to a better understanding and open line of communication with her students.

Jenna shared that her students were more engaged and less aggressive by the end of her school year. Jenna shared that she became more in tune with understanding students' emotions. Another critical factor discussed by participants was familiarizing oneself with the key personnel in the building new teachers can reach out to for resources and support. They shared that asking questions and being involved in the school community as much as possible helps access resources. Marco shared that his students usually share electronic devices and having a few

teachers who can reach out to share devices helps with the flow of his class. He stated that it ensures that students can access technology and engage in multiple ways for his lessons.

Participants expressed that familiarizing themselves with IEP team members is also essential. Charles Bronson shared that building relationships and collaborating with the school psychologist and diverse range of therapists who worked with students in his class and talking to their previous teachers helps track student growth and leads to a greater understanding of how to support the student.

Participants who teach in an ICT classroom shared that having a co-teacher also offers support. Marco shared that having a co-teacher to bounce off ideas was helpful compared to his placement in a self-contained class where he is now the only teacher. Sister Mary Clarence shared that ICT has pros and cons in that she was not alone in the classroom, and her co-teacher guided her through her first few months. However, she shared that having another teacher in class added some anxiety due to continuous worry that she was performing her best. Jenna shared that the support of IEP, reading, and math coaches was beneficial. However, only Jenna in this study received this level of support in one of her earlier teaching experiences.

Mentors and veteran teacher advice were another external support contributing to teachers' self-efficacy to teach Black students with disabilities. Jenna shared the following statement regarding her mentor relationship:

I was welcomed with a great mentor during my first-year teaching. My mentor helped to improve my teaching skills. Through her, I was able to develop best practice while teaching. I was able to increase resiliency, enhance communication skills with families and colleagues and boost my self-confidence.

Charles Bronson shared that his mentor helped and provided him with tips and resources to support him as a special education teacher. Veteran teachers, those who have been teaching for a

long time, offered sound advice such as "make parents your best friends" and "stay in contact with parents" to participants in the study. Participants were also encouraged to ensure that when they created special education IEP goals for students, they were short, realistic, and attainable for students. Participants shared that veteran teachers advised them to "remain organized, not to reinvent the wheel, and not to put too much on your plate." Lastly, during focus group interview #1, a participant shared that the best advice received from a veteran teacher was as follows:

Regardless of the politics that's going on in the school, always remember that, you know, helping students make growth and learning is the key. So regardless of what's going on around in the school, you know what the students need to grow, do what you need to do. When asked how confident participants felt during their first year of educating Black students with disabilities based on their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training, participants expressed the following:

Marco: "I'm feeling a lot more confident...I wrote down so many things that I would do differently starting next year."

Bob Mayer: "Uh, as confident as I could be for a first-year teacher. I definitely knew that there would be a lot of challenges."

Jenna: "The first two days without students [laugh] I was like, Yes! I got my own classroom that I had visited. I was like okay, let see, let's set it up [laugh] ... I could only laugh now because it was so overwhelming for me. I remember going home every single night, telling my husband, I don't know [laugh] I don't think I could do this anymore." Jenna then explained that with the support of IEP guiding her, reading coaches who taught her how to complete benchmark reading assessments and training how to facilitate small reading groups, and math coaches to support new teachers in math those supports set her up to feel confident and prepared to teach Black students with disabilities.

Molly: “I was 50/50 because I was somewhat nervous. I was really confident and then I was really nervous, but I felt like I knew enough to manage my classroom and to service the children and give them what they needed. So I felt confident and as the year progressed, I gained more confidence and less nervousness.”

Sister Mary Clarence: “I feel like, uh, like a pot is running over, like I’m trying to catch the spills [laugh] and the buckets are just not getting them, it’s just overflowing.” Sister Mary Clarence was in her sixth month of teaching at the time of the interview and in her second teaching position at her school. First, she supported a class in the ICT setting, and a month before the interview was reassigned to be the special education teacher in a self-contained classroom.

Charles Bronson: I feel somewhat confident, you know not the utmost, but um you know like I feel like a large factor is that I didn’t start at the beginning of the year. Okay. Um, I feel like I was kind of transplanted in a sense.

During moments of reflection, Marco shared that although he did not immediately feel confident in the classroom, as time went on, he felt less “embarrassed”. His confidence slowly grew, and he released the need to feel like he needed to be a perfect teacher. He attributed the opportunities for practical experiences during student teaching to significantly contributing to his sense of self-efficacy. Jenna shared that she recognized that she was not only a teacher to teach but also to learn, and by welcoming support from her mentor and coaches, she increased her resiliency and boosted her self-confidence in her ability to educate her students. Charles Bronson expressed that his substitute teaching experience and ongoing in-service training contribute most to his self-confidence and self-efficacy in the classroom. He said he is still learning to manage the challenges and the incredible rewards of being a teacher. Bob Mayer was released by his administration from his teaching assignment after his first year in the classroom, and stated that

although that affected his sense of self-efficacy, the relationship built with students even after they graduated reminds him that he is doing something well. He described the profession of teaching as one of the most rewarding professions. Molly expressed that her teacher preparation and student teaching experiences prepared her and gave her confidence to educate Black students with disabilities. However, she said that common knowledge also played a role. According to Molly, when something taught previously do not work, she decides whether to continue doing things that way or try a new way to address the skill issue. Molly shared that she often takes the information shared during training and tweaks it to meet the needs of her students if there is a need to do so. Sister Mary Clarence shared the following statement:

I tell myself I had to physically mourn not being great. I had to mourn, um, getting an ineffective rating before I even received one. I had to mourn, not being perfect because that's what I thought. I thought I was going to come in and have it know the ball out the park. But I understand that it's a game and I'm just a pawn in the game.

Bob Mayer described self-efficacy as being “built through experience, struggle, and ultimately self-reflection and being one's worst critic.” Lastly, all the participants shared that having a passion for teaching sustains them in the classroom to continue to teach Black students with disabilities.

Preparation for Educating Black Students with Disabilities

The fourth finding of this study focused on how participants described their teacher preparation programs, including aspects of the program they believed fostered growth and learning, ways in which the program discussed race and disability of students, descriptions of student teaching experiences and the stories told of areas they lacked adequate preparation.

Finding #4 addressed the research question: How are such stories demonstrating special education teachers' prior knowledge of race and disability in education?

Characteristics of Teacher Training Programs

While the participants in the study attended various types of preparation programs such as private universities, public universities and colleges, and online religious private institutions, they all identified essential aspects of their preparation programs that prepared them for the classroom and other significant areas in which their programs could enhance. The participants' description of their teacher preparation programs included reference to dual certification in which students obtained both general education and special education licensure upon completion by being exposed to both general education courses and "a few special education classes thrown in," as stated by Marco. Four out of the six participants indicated that their schools did not include an *Urban Strand*. It is essential to understand that an urban strand includes courses specifically designed to teach and expose student teachers to matters related to race, culture, language, diversity, and socioeconomic diversity of students (Blanchett et al., 2009). Charles Bronson stated, "I believe so" when asked, and Jenna responded, "Yes, African American professors tailored it the best they could."

Participants referenced various areas in their teacher preparation program that fostered growth in their learning and prepared them for the classroom. Programs that included small class sizes, accessibility to professors, tailored instruction to meet student teachers' needs, emphasis on lesson planning, accessibility to counselors who guided them on best courses, direct connections to school placements for observations, mentors, infusion, and exposure to technology, and aspects of their training that prepared them to work collaboratively with parents were all key identifiers of teacher programs teachers expressed were beneficial to their preparation as special education teachers.

Discussion of Disability

Jenna reflected on the disability category her teacher preparation program prepared her most for:

So I was prepared more for like an autistic child and how to prepare them and how to like help that population a little bit much more. Now, when it was with students with, um, speech impairment, it was again from the White population where it's like, okay, they're typically developing on grade level, but there's a little bit of a speech language that's like stopping them to continue to be proficient.

Teacher preparation discussion of student disabilities, as reflected by the participants, asserted that schools encouraged teachers to use person-first language when describing a student with a disability. Participants learned to view disability through an asset-based lens. Charles Bronson and Jenna shared that their programs taught student teachers about the historical context of IDEA, 504 plans, students, and parents with disability rights. Sister Mary Clarence shared that when discussing disabilities, her program "broke it up into different categories" and provided website resources teachers can use to support and help students.

When explicitly asked how programs discussed all educational disability categories, Jenna, Marco, and Molly stated that their programs were tailored towards the Autism Spectrum population and included a strand on preparing teachers to become Applied Behavioral Analyst. Therefore, their programs adopted a behavioral approach to understanding disabilities, as it informed students that behaviors were a form of communication.

None of the six participants mentioned that they learned about working with students in the following disability categories: vision impairments, emotional disabilities, deafness/deafblindness, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injury, or intellectual disabilities. Participants referenced learning about students

with behavioral disabilities, indicating that their teacher preparation programs discussed ways teachers can support and motivate students presenting behavioral challenges. Jenna reported that her program briefly discussed learning disabilities—however, there was more emphasis on autism.

Based on NCES (2021) data, the highest percentage of students who "drop out" are students with emotional disabilities at 33%, and African American students are amongst the highest subgroups of students who receive special education services under emotional disabilities and other health impairments. This highlights the necessity for teacher preparation programs to expand their focus of study to better prepare teachers for the diverse needs of all students.

The exclusion of directly addressing race in classrooms across the United States insinuates that the educational system is neutral and provides all students equal learning opportunities and experiences (Klingner et al., 2007). In 2016, the percentage of Black children under 18 living in poverty was 31%, the highest among Hispanics 26%, White 10%, and Asian 10% (NCES, 2016). In 2021, 7.4 million Black students attended public schools across the United States, the third highest ethnic group after White and Hispanics (NCES, 2021). Therefore, it is vital to examine how teacher preparation programs address race, the impact of poverty in education, the historical context of special education, and how it has impacted Black people.

Interestingly, Charles Bronson shared that one of his professors often advised his cohort that many job opportunities are available in city school and urban communities because it is less competitive than suburban communities. However, he added that his professor informed them that it was essential to have no biases, refrain from marginalizing students, and do the right thing to be accepted by the community.

Participants revealed that their teacher preparation programs barely discussed race. If they did, it was through "umbrella terms" and "blanket statements" instead of confronting racial identities and ethnic groups directly, like the description above from Charles Bronson. Throughout the interviews, participants consistently stated that their programs did not address how to teach Black and Brown students. Instead, professors referenced race through broad ideas of encouraging students to be culturally responsive. Bob Mayer shared that his program discussion of race "barely scratched the surface." Charles Bronson shared that race was never explicitly discussed beyond being told about the over-representation of African American boys in special education. Future teachers in the United States must prepare to educate the nation's most concentrated population of impoverished students receiving special education and attending disadvantaged public schools. Encouraging student teachers to avoid biases and marginalization against ethnic groups while there is a general denial of talking about race in teacher preparation programs and is the overall social thinking of Americans (Payne, 2006 as cited in Delpit, 2006) is not sufficient in a country founded on racist principles and one that continues to provide inequitable educational standards for Black students overall.

Participants experienced in-person and remote student teaching opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants who obtained dual certification completed both general education and special education classroom opportunities for student teaching. Descriptions of the in-person experience included the support of a co-teacher and or mentor coach. Participants shared that during classroom observations, they watched and learned how teachers taught in their classrooms. When provided with opportunities beyond observing the classroom, Marco shared that he was merely a helper within the class and not provided opportunities to prepare lessons or teach the class. However, participants noted that they worked hands-on with students one-on-one or in small groups.

During student teaching, Molly indicated that she worked in a specialized special education school for students with developmental delays in a suburban neighborhood. She shared that she observed the presence of a sensory-integrated playground suitable and developmentally appropriate for children who required sensory input. Molly expressed that those teachers worked explicitly with students on their IEP goals during specific times of the day. Staff implemented token economies to reward children when they made progress toward their goals. She observed that the program included the utilization of augmented communication devices for students who were nonverbal. Molly shared that at the school, there were one or two Black students with disabilities.

Sister Mary Clarence conducted her student teaching at the school where she worked as a teacher's assistant for ten years. She believed she was strategically placed in the classroom to support a newly hired teacher. However, Sister Mary Clarence described the situation as a learning experience, indicating they helped each other. She guided the teacher in the "silly" day-to-day nuances specific to the school building, such as developing "I can" statements and creating bulletin boards, an aspect that teacher preparation programs do not prepare teachers. Sister Mary Clarence expressed that the classroom teacher taught her the practice of patience and how to turn a negative situation into something beautiful, lessons she would carry throughout her role as a teacher.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted Charles Bronson's and Bob Mayer's student teaching opportunities. As a result, Charles Bronson completed his experience through virtual observation. He described his student teaching experience as follows: "We watched videos and wrote about it. The teacher did this, the students, and blah, blah, blah. And, that was, um, that was considered our fieldwork experience."

Bob Mayer shared that his teacher preparation program closed during the height of the pandemic and reconvened during the summer and, at that time, completed his student teaching experience in a specialized program for students with Autism. Charles Bronson expressed that he wished for an in-person experience for his fieldwork assignment; however, he noted that his experience as a substitute teacher better prepared him for his daily role as a special education teacher, although it was through a hybrid experience, part in person and online, he worked with Black students who prepared him for his current teaching assignment of being a special education teacher in an ICT setting in an urban community.

Participants discussed the racial identities of students they worked with during student teaching experiences, which were primarily populations of White and Asian students. Sister Mary Clarence shared that her student teaching experience was in a public school in an urban community and, as a result, worked directly with Black students with disabilities. Molly reflected on her teacher preparation and student teaching experiences, indicating:

Um, I look at my teaching program, I think from my teaching program, I didn't see Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, I didn't see any of that. But then coming into the field and teaching in the classroom that I teach in, um, I do see the difference and with the Black and Brown kids, they need more and they deserve more because they're not given that.

Molly's quote highlighted the stories participants told about their lack of preparation to meet the needs of Black students with disabilities through course content and experiences to enhance their prior knowledge of race and disability in education.

Lack of Preparation

Overall, participants shared that their teacher preparation program did not adequately provide the learning opportunities and experience needed to prepare them to educate Black students with disabilities. Five participants completed student teaching in predominantly White

and Asian communities. One participant worked in a community of color for student teaching. Programs placed heavy emphasis on preparing teachers to work with students on the autism spectrum. Participant stories reflected ableist assumptions made by teacher educators when discussing students with disabilities, deficit perspectives, and their need to fix and motivate them to learn and behave instead of creating an environment to make learning accessible to all learners. Participants learned classroom management techniques, which they reported were beneficial. However, they were not exposed to relevant conversations to understand why Black students in urban communities impacted by poverty react differently from a child from wealthy homes and a well-resourced school community. Except for Jenna, who shared that her African American professors tried to tailor instruction for teaching Black students. Participants expressed that student teaching served as a stepping-stone with guided support, but once in their classroom, they described it as being thrown "into the fire" and "diving face first."

During focus group interviews, participants shared that they lacked preparation in implementing proactive strategies to prevent behaviors through identifying triggers and teaching techniques to adapt to crises. Participants shared that teachers in the classrooms require skills beyond preparing students academically. Factors such as home life and dealing with a wide range of student's emotions are enormous components of educating students, which they expressed their teacher preparation did not adequately address. Additionally, participants shared that due to the race and socioeconomic differences of students they worked with during student teaching and who they currently teach, more preparation is needed to specifically work with Black students with disabilities in low-resource communities with high incidences of behavioral challenges and impaired academic learning abilities. Discrit theory advocates for the robust notion of learning about the unexamined notions around race, culture, and student abilities since school systems and teacher preparation programs focus on White middle-class norms and expectations (Connor et

al., 2016). Through participant narrative stories, this study's participants echo the need for teacher preparation programs to address race and disability to prepare them to work with Black students with disabilities.

Educational Responsibility for Black Students with Disabilities

The fifth finding of this study focused on the stories special education shared about their perceptions of educational success for Black students with disabilities. Finding #5 answered research questions: How do the stories describe their ability to work with Black students with disabilities? And how do the stories of their prior knowledge influence their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?

Participants' overall discussion about race and racial stereotypes centered around parental involvement as an educational responsibility for them to educate Black students. Black students within this study are those with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa, including Black Americans, Africans, Haitians, Afro-Caribbeans, and Black South or Central Americans (CIBMTR Forms Manual). In conducting the study, participant Bob Mayer stated:

I guess that the umbrella of teaching like Black students is also pretty like encompassing in the sense that like the first school that I was at in location A, like most of those students predominantly are like, are most of their cultures are from the Caribbean ones. Whereas where I'm at now, it's more Haitians and like those two are different cultures, both Black, but it's like, what might work for a Jamaican student might not work for a Haitian.

Participants in the study work with Black/African Americans, Africans, and Afro-Caribbeans. As discussed within the fourth finding of this study, participants expressed that their teacher preparation programs did not include an urban strand, vaguely discussed race, spoke about race in umbrella terms, or addressed it briefly while discussing the importance of being Culturally

Responsive in the classroom. Jenna shared that her African American professors were able to make teaching more relatable with their experiences. Bob Mayer discussed how race and culture vary from community to community. He suggested that it may be why teacher preparation programs "gave us an umbrella overview of race without fully jumping into it."

Participants' race was not a variable of this study as the researcher focused on special education teachers' stories and feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities. However, three out of the six participants were from the Black diaspora, and three were White. The stories expressed illustrated participants' experiences and perceptions of teaching Black students.

Race Matters: Racial Stereotypes

Black parents' willingness to accept or resist special education services was a consistent theme amongst participants when describing their perceptions and abilities to work with Black students with disabilities. Molly and Sister Mary Clarence described their experience working with Black students with disabilities as a "culture shock." Molly asserted that:

It's a culture shock because, um, seeing more and more I am seeing Black students who are diagnosed and put into special education, but I think there's also a fight where the parents don't think that their child belongs there or think, oh, they just need to speak nothing else. Nothing else is wrong with them. And I think that's where my shock is [laugh]...some parents even talk about themselves who started to talk late and think it's the same thing that going to be with their child.

Sister Mary Clarence said that in the community where she works, "These parents are different. These children are different. And I never thought that having the same identity as them, I can be different." She then explained that by different, she meant that although the students were from low socioeconomic homes,

Poverty is not about money. It's a state of mind. And they have a poor state of mind. They have a poor disposition about school, learning and education and what that's supposed to mean. They pass that down to their children.

Marco expressed the challenges he experiences while working with his class of Black students with disabilities as he expressed that they are different from his field experience student teaching. Marco said those students were focused and motivated much "easier to work with."

According to Marco:

In terms of the actual teaching and the interactions I have with them, it's a lot harder to keep them focused than motivated than just I guess interested in what I have for them to learn. I really have to dig in terms of what are their interest and are they like, and try and figure out ways to get that related into the lesson and to incorporate that. Otherwise, it's just extremely difficult for them to even focus on me because it almost seems like they'd rather be doing literally anything else, but sitting in the classroom and listening to what you have to say.

Consciously or subconsciously, participants commonly described racial stereotypes when discussing their experiences while working with Black students and their families. While describing the type of training received in graduate school and the preparation received to become a special education teacher, Jenna shared the following:

It was more like the, um, I guess more of the white community where I did my grad school program. There wasn't more like African American. So I felt like, yes, they did teach us. I mean, classroom management, but when you do or when you are faced with more different problems, then classroom management becomes a little bit more real because now you have to worry about, you know, this one didn't eat this morning, and you know, the reaction is because mom didn't tell me I loved you this morning. However, as Jenna continued to describe her

experiences in the classroom, she shared that gaining parents' trust, parent compliance, and working collaboratively with parents typically helped improve students' behavior in the school, making it an optimal environment for student learning. Molly expressed similar sentiments when she described working with African American students in a "different socioeconomic status; they're more in tune with their child and what the child needs and work with the teachers who work with their child." Jenna asserted that throughout her student teaching experiences, the students were reading on grade level, and parents used their voice and had a say about what their child was learning and exercised their rights. Marco discussed that at his student teaching, all students had access to devices, and now, in his current school placement, the schools provided no devices, and even if students had devices at home, their parents often refused to send students with them due to concerns that it would get broken. He discussed the challenges of accessing devices for his students since he incorporates technology in his lessons.

Love (2019) discussed how pedagogy must help teachers contextualize students' realities since students are not responsible for their reality. When teachers focus on the distinct difference in parents' willingness, advocacy skills, or availability as tied to one's socioeconomic status, it minimizes the actuality that parents of all socioeconomic statuses focus on their children's education (Lareau, 2011). When programs fail to prepare teachers for the classroom by avoiding or vaguely discussing the impact of race, class, and disability, it perpetuates inequality and racially stereotypical rhetoric in society toward Black individuals, including children, who are merely by-products of their environment. Teachers should be encouraged to nurture and educate students while fostering opportunities for self-determination and teaching students with disabilities the skills to self-advocate for their needs, set goals, make decisions, and improve self-awareness (Carter et al., 2011).

Summary

I discussed the qualitative narrative inquiry study findings in detail throughout Chapter 4. Five major themes emerged: 1.) Teacher preparation and professional development recommendations 2.) Perceived expectations vs. perceived reality 3.) Confidence produced through intrinsic motivation and extrinsic supports 4.) Preparation for educating Black students with disabilities 5.) Educational responsibility for Black students with disabilities.

This research suggests that special education teachers with less than five years of classroom experience working in urban communities with Black students with disabilities attribute intrinsic motivation and extrinsic support to significantly impact their feelings of self-efficacy and confidence in the classroom. The preparation and training received during teacher preparation and professional development also played a crucial role in preparing participants for the classroom. However, participants described the disconnect of perceived realities between content and exposure during student teaching and working in a school community, specifically in an urban school setting with limited resources. It is essential to analyze these factors, as participants described a lack of preparation for educating Black students with disabilities. Lastly, this study also suggests the perceived role of Black parent involvement and socioeconomic status in participants' ability and effectiveness of teaching Black students with disabilities.

The results and interpretations from this narrative inquiry of special education teachers' stories and experiences in teaching Black students with disabilities support the need for improved teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training. The findings reveal a need to expose and diversify educator staff and student teaching opportunities to provide teachers with a global overview of students with varying needs and abilities. Teachers must be prepared and knowledgeable about the needs of students with marginalized intersecting identities. Black

students with disabilities deserve to be educated by knowledgeable and experienced teachers with proactive strategies and support to help students achieve their goals and postsecondary outcomes for success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

New teachers must complete teacher preparation programs that provide them the pedagogical knowledge and fieldwork experiences needed to educate children from racially diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and learning abilities for classrooms of the wealthy, middle-class, and low-income in urban or suburban communities. Racism impacts multiple systems and has produced inequality within institutional structures, culture, interpersonal lives, and the lives of individuals (Funk et al., 2018). The current research study centered on teacher narratives as they describe their feelings of self-efficacy and preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities based on their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training.

In Chapter One, I introduced my positionality. I explained how my role, reflexivity, and philosophy for education led me through a doctoral program to be an advocate and voice for marginalized students with disabilities. I also provided context for this study and presented background information regarding the importance of examining special education teachers' self-efficacy and preparedness for educating Black students with disabilities. Chapter Two consists of my literature review, organized, and divided into two major themes: (1) teacher preparation and diversity training and (2) teacher self-efficacy and preparedness to teach special education. My research combines discrit theory and teacher self-efficacy theory to discover how special education teachers reported self-efficacy in their ability to educate Black students with disabilities effectively. I outlined in Chapter Three how I conducted this qualitative study in detail. I explained how this narrative inquiry design allowed me to gather and analyze the stories told by special education teachers and how this design was the best option for the study's purpose and research questions after contemplating other methods. Themes were analyzed and developed

from the participants' responses. In Chapter Four, I analyzed participants' interviews and discussed the findings that answered the research questions.

Historically, Black individuals have experienced racist practices and experience consistent structural barriers that prevent economic growth and educational success. Disproportionality is a symptom of the inequities that impact Black students' education. Black students are often miseducated and face institutional barriers such as attending schools that lack essential resources and technological advancements, teacher shortages, teachers with few years of experience, and teachers who are not prepared to work with diverse student populations effectively (Banks et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2009). The construct of ableism as discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes against individuals with disabilities and any related discussion must include highlighting the importance of viewing ableism through a race and class intersectional lens (Bogart & Dunn, 2019). This intersectional framework lens allows individuals to view how impacted persons, such as Black and disabled individuals, experience stark inequalities and differences compared to other racial groups. For example, the overrepresentation and disproportionality of students of color suspended from school, in juvenile justice systems, in foster care, and murdered by police. Sanford et al. (2011) noted that Black students with disabilities attending K-12 schools in the United States do not progress academically at the same rate as other races, are less likely to achieve academic goals, and have poorer long-term outcomes, such as employment and postsecondary enrollment rates. Therefore, it is imperative to examine teacher narratives to their preparedness and self-efficacy to educate Black students with intersecting marginalized identities, such as Black and disabled.

This study explored the stories and reflections of special education teachers' preparation and perception of their self-efficacy for educating Black students with disabilities by examining the influence of their teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service professional

development on their experiences. Guided by the overarching question, "What stories do special education teachers tell when they describe their preparation for educating Black students with disabilities?" Sub questions included:

1. What learning experiences do special education teachers describe as most important for their preparation to educate Black students with disabilities?
 - A. What are the key stories participants tell when they describe their understanding of special education teachers' learning experiences in preparation for educating Black students with disabilities?
 - B. What are the key stories participants tell to describe their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities?
2. How are such stories demonstrating special education teachers' prior knowledge of race and disability in education?
 - A. How do the stories describe their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?
 - B. How do the stories of their prior knowledge influence their ability to work with Black students with disabilities?

Using a narrative research design for this study allowed special education teachers to tell the narrative of their preparedness to educate their Black students with disabilities. Through storytelling, teachers reflected on what they believed to be most beneficial and essential to their feelings of self-efficacy in the classroom. Three methods of data collection occurred that allowed for triangulation. Participants narrated reflective stories through a journal writing prompt during the first data collection phase. The essay prompted participants to write to their younger selves as student teachers as they reflected on their preparation to work with Black students with disabilities. The second phase required all participants to engage in a one-on-one semi-structured

and open-ended interview to discuss further and expand on their narrative essays, along with completing a demographic questionnaire. The third and final data collection phase was through focus group interviews. I created the two focus groups based on participant completion of the study. To ensure validity and reliability, participants reviewed final recorded transcriptions and written samples to ensure the accuracy of their statements and triangulation to ensure the credibility of the data. Rev.com was used to transcribe individual and focus group interviews. Once transcribed, I reviewed the audio of each interview to ensure the accuracy of statements in the audio recordings.

I conducted coding in two cycles, and the data analysis process co-occurred. I conducted preliminary coding such as in-vivo, open-coding, descriptive, and value coding during the initial stages of data collection through computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software such as Dedoose. The second stage allowed me to conceptualize further all the data collected to analyze the patterns and categorization of words or phrases reflecting commonalities and differences in participants shared themes (Fraser, 2004). Strategies such as highlighting keyword patterns and documenting trends of participants' responses occurred throughout the initial and second coding cycles. Themes were developed through coding methods, resulting from inductive coding. The study's findings, results, and interpretation describe data collected from the participants' narrative essays, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The following conclusion summarizes the findings and answers the research question guided by the discrit and teacher self-efficacy theories. The conclusion also includes recommendations for future research.

This qualitative narrative inquiry study utilized discrit and teacher self-efficacy theoretical frameworks to explore teachers' reported self-efficacy about their preparedness to educate Black students with disabilities based on their teacher preparation and ongoing in-service training. Discrit theory is a framework that combines disability studies (DS) and critical race

theory (CRT) (Connor et al., 2016) and focuses on examining the lived societal experiences related to intersections of ableism and racism. According to Annamma et al. (2013), dis/crit in education theorizes about the interlocking relationship of racism and ableism, specifically, how it impacts students of color differently than white students with disabilities. Therefore, this framework helped frame the research questions developed to analyze how Black students with disabilities are affected in the classroom daily. Discussed below are the seven tenets of dis/crit,

- (1) Dis/Crit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy
- (2) Dis/Crit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on
- (3) Dis/Crit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms
- (4) Dis/Crit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research
- (5) Dis/Crit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens
- (6) Dis/Crit recognizes Whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens
- (7) Dis/Crit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (Annamma et al., 2013, p.11).

Bandura (1977) coined the term *self-efficacy*, which refers to a person's belief about their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Teachers' self-efficacy plays a role in motivating and influencing students' academic achievement outcomes. Teachers' belief in their ability to complete specific tasks strongly predicts student achievement, hence why exploring teachers' self-efficacy towards working with culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities

benefits education. Researchers have conducted considerable research on teacher self-efficacy, but few have studied teacher efficacy in educating students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds (Chu, 2011; Zhang et al., 2018). Berg and Smith (2018) asserted that strong self-efficacy is attributed to low attrition rates for new teachers. Hence, exploring special education teachers' self-efficacy based on their teacher preparation and ongoing in-service training is beneficial to determine their sustainability level for educating Black students with disabilities—a population of students often encountered by schools with teacher shortages and lack of experience.

Findings and Implications

There is so much to learn from the voices of special education teachers about the stories special education teachers tell when describing their preparation for educating Black students with disabilities. This study produced five significant findings: 1.) Teacher preparation and professional development recommendations 2.) Perceived expectations vs. perceived reality 3.) Confidence produced through intrinsic motivation and extrinsic supports 4.) Preparation for educating Black students with disabilities 5.) Educational responsibility for Black students with disabilities.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Recommendations

Participants in the study overwhelmingly indicated that teacher preparation programs and in-service training must improve to proactively prepare and equip teachers with the necessary skills and tools to teach Black students with disabilities in urban communities. Harry and Klingner (2014) reported on teacher quality and found a clear pattern of less-prepared teachers in low-income, Black neighborhoods. The findings suggest a need to increase diversity within preparation programs. Participants expressed that their programs vaguely discussed matters of

race. One participant, Jenna, shared that her African American professors tried to include discussions of race more than her White professors.

Additionally, diversity in teacher-educator staff is needed, as well as in anecdotes and classroom experiences during student teaching or fieldwork experiences. Adichie (2009) described the dangers of a single story as it contributes to one-sided stories of people, groups, or places. The study participants expressed that teacher educator staff lacked diversity and, as a result, lacked culturally relevant anecdotes to share with student teachers about diverse communities and those with diverse learning needs. Additionally, participants expressed that exposure to mainly White or Asian students within upper- or middle-class neighborhoods during their student teaching experience did not adequately prepare them for the realities of teaching Black students in low-income urban communities that typically are under-resourced and lack support for new teachers.

The study participants also expressed that teacher preparation programs mainly focused on the learning needs of students on the autism spectrum or speech and language impairments and lacked exposure to students with varying conditions and disabilities. Participants overall a need for preparedness to manage and support students with significant learning deficits, behavioral challenges, and physical impairments as they indicated they were not exposed to students with those needs in student teaching but confronted by students with these needs in their current teaching positions. Teachers desired preparation programs provided proactive strategies in managing students' behaviors and learning supports. In-service training, as described by participants, typically did not address the specific needs of Black students with disabilities. Participants desire increased opportunities to collaborate with other teachers and expressed the need for administrators to be more supportive and knowledgeable about the needs of students receiving special education.

More Race and Disability Exposure

During the interviews, participants described the need to be exposed to a range of disability classifications and academic skills in their training to better understand diversity within classroom learning environments. Overall, more expansive knowledge is needed by teachers on the range of diverse disabilities that can be present in classrooms to better serve student populations.

Special education teachers are graduating from teacher preparation programs without exposure to effectively work with Black students in urban communities with varying needs and challenges. Participants of this study expressed the need for teacher preparation programs and inservice training to explicitly discuss and prepare new teachers about the intersectionality of race and disability to understand how Black students are impacted differently and educated within schools with limited resources. Participant Marco shared that he wished his program prepared him for the under-resourced classroom compared to his experiences in which he assumed teaching would be easy.

Young (2016) argued that many programs teach students about educational inequalities; however, only a few explicitly teach about the intersection between race, ethnicity, and diversity. The study participants desired a more holistic approach to understanding family culture and structure and an approach that would have prepared them to meet the diverse needs of students. Teacher preparation programs must include discourse through the lens of capital theory to improve teachers' perspective of the educational inequities due to race, language, sociodemographic, historical, and cultural differences among students and their families (Trainor, 2010).

Political Influences

“Through centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country live up to its founding ideals. And not only for ourselves - black rights struggles paved the way for every other rights struggle, including women’s and gay rights, immigrant and disability rights” (Hannah-Jones, 2019).

Hannah-Jones (2019), through 'The 1619 Project' examined the legacy, history, and impact of slavery on present-day American life, asserting that Black Americans have contributed not only to America's wealth but also to freedom movements through protests and advocacy such as the Women's, Gay, Immigrant and Disability rights movements. Yet, some American political leaders disagree with the reporting of 'The 1619 Project' and have referred to the call for antiracist practices in educational teachings, known as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), as a threat to US democracy. The 'Individual Freedom Act' otherwise known as the 'Stop WOKE Act' was implemented by Florida political officials as measures to restrict and prohibit the free speech of educators and employers in how concepts related to systemic racism and discrimination "can be discussed in teaching or conducting training in workplaces or schools" (ACLU, 2023).

Unlike Florida, the NYSED Board of Regents issued a call to action in support of implementing DEI policies and practices to encourage efforts at the state and local level to create systems in place built on the foundation of diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and opportunity to ensure that students feel welcome and supported in every school community (NYSED, 2021). It addressed the need for inclusive and culturally responsive teaching, with clear implications for school districts to consider "acknowledging the role that racism and bigotry have played, and continue to play, in the American story" (NYSED, 2021).

The examples of antiracist practices and teachings allowed by New York State in comparison to Florida further support the implications of the current research, which highlights the importance of training and preparing all teachers to educate Black students with disabilities. There needs to be cohesive, proactive measures to ensure antiracist and anti-ableist teaching curricula and practices across the United States to ensure equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging for all students. Institutions of higher learning across the United States also need to ensure that their teacher educators are exposed to and trained on practices and policies of antiracist and anti-ableist views to promote fair treatment and participation for all individuals, specifically those historically underrepresented and marginalized.

Perceived Expectations versus Perceived Reality

Connor et al. (2016) described discrit theory as how race, racism, dis/ability, and ableism are built into the daily interactions, discourses, and educational institutions, affecting students of color with disabilities. Prior studies have discussed the inequities, unbalanced, and disadvantages Black students within and without disabilities in high poverty, high minority, and underresourced schools faced with daily when receiving an education in the United States in comparison to their affluent White peers (Blanchett, 2009; Taylor & King, 2021; Wald & Losen, 2003). Participants of this study, stories about their understanding, preparation, and experiences of special education to educate Black students with disabilities reveal a disconnect between their perceived expectations and perceived reality. This study found that participants observed, learned, and were exposed mainly to White and Asian students in affluent or middle-income communities. During their fieldwork experiences, participants shared that they observed teachers working individually with students towards their IEP goals, compared to their current position where the IEP goals must be targeted within the curriculum since there is no additional time to work in the day to work specifically on goals. Participants also described distinct differences in the school structure

and support, resources, and technology available, and parent engagement and feedback. During student teaching, participants expressed that their classrooms had available technology to allow students to access the curriculum through various methods.

Additionally, some students had augmented communication devices compared to their current classrooms, where students only have access to a speech therapist and a picture exchange board. One interesting finding is that administrative support and resources impacted participants' perceived expectations and realities. Participants shared that when the administration understood the needs of special education teachers and students in school communities, the support provided to help students and teachers in the classroom was evident. On the other hand, when administrators did not understand the needs of the special education teachers, participants expressed the expectation to rigidly stick to the curriculum and not tailor the lesson to the needs of the students in the classroom.

Participants expressed that textbook knowledge and practical skills needed for the classroom differed significantly, and they tended to learn and adapt as each day went by. Lack of exposure and observations within urban communities of Black students with disabilities further contributed to participants' disconnection between their perceived expectations and reality. Participants shared how they often used their money to purchase resources to enhance their students' learning experience. Participants reported feeling under-prepared to serve Black students due to their lack of exposure during student teaching. Also, participants shared that while exposed to school communities with accessible technology and various supports such as mentors and coaches, adapting to schools lacking technology and resources was an eye-opener.

New teachers placed in classrooms of Black students with disabilities expressed that after lack of exposure to work with the population during teacher preparation, navigating school communities with minimal resources, educating students with limited academic, language, and

behavioral skills while adapting to the expectations of administration contributed to a feeling of disconnection between what they expected and their reality. Overall, participants expressed that their teacher preparation programs, and in-service training contribute little to their overall confidence and self-efficacy in the classroom. Instead, participants attribute various intrinsic motivators and extrinsic supports as the main contributors to their confidence and sustainability in teaching classrooms of Black students with disabilities.

Confidence Produced through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Economic Supports

Studies find that self-efficacy is evidenced by how teachers perceive their ability to execute effective practices successfully and whether they believe they have what it takes to bring about change (Berg & Smith, 2018; Chu, 2011; Doran, 2020). This rather intriguing finding participants shared revealed that their internalized thoughts, beliefs, and personal desires described as mantras contribute to their feelings of self-efficacy in the classroom. Participants described these narratives through factors that motivate them and why they persevere in teaching while building resiliency and self-determination. External supports such as building relationships with colleagues, parents, mentors, veteran teachers, opportunities for teacher collaboration, and the ability to seek resources in the school community were all key factors participants expressed that contributed to their feelings of self-efficacy to educate Black students with disabilities.

There is limited literature that measures teacher self-efficacy in special education. (Zhang et al., 2018). Freer (2018) found that educators' attitudes and self-efficacy are critical in the overall educational progression of students as educators serve as the gatekeepers to students' knowledge and future opportunities. The participants of this study reported mixed feelings of self-efficacy. For instance, during their first year of teaching, participants described low feelings of self-efficacy; however, with external support and fostered relationships, participants' feelings of self-efficacy increased. Overall, participants identified their passion for teaching, personal

mantras on why they are in the field, and self-encouragement quotes that sustain and strengthen their confidence in educating Black students with disabilities. This finding of the study is evidence that new teachers require supportive structures in place when in school communities.

Preparation for Educating Black Students with Disabilities

Participants in this study identified areas of their teacher preparation programs that prepared them for the classrooms, such as small class sizes, accessibility to professors, tailored instruction to meet their needs, a strong emphasis on lesson planning, accessibility to counselors, direction connections to school placement opportunities, mentors, and exposure to technology.

Participants reported that teacher preparation lacked specific instruction and exposure to working with Black students with disabilities. Participants shared that their teacher preparation programs did not include an urban strand or race-related topics. Teacher preparation programs did not address the intersectionality of race and disabilities and the ways they impact multiply marginalized students in the classroom.

Ladson-Billings (2021) discussed the need for a hard re-set-in education, specifically in the curriculum post-COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that rather than focusing on "slavery, immigration, Manifest Destiny, and American Exceptionalism" the curriculum should engage questions and discussions of "sovereignty, liminality, otherness, hegemony, and reparations" (p.73). Teacher preparation programs must provide sufficient knowledge-based concepts beyond that of posting pictures that represent diversity on classroom walls and instead be aware that the true meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy is for educators to examine "the context of society that reinforces notions of inferiority and insignificance" (p.70).

Teachers' first experience teaching Black students with disabilities should not occur through the culture of power which describes the power dynamics between teachers and students in the classroom (Delpit, 1988). Teachers play an essential role in the lives of students.

Therefore, teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service training designed to meet the needs of students with intersecting marginalities, such as Black and disabled, are essential for the progress and postsecondary success rate of students with disabilities. Patton (2016) asserted that institutions of higher learning are not immune to and contribute to the complicit creation of racial inequities in K-12 schools, best addressed through grounded Critical Race theory in education. Below are three prepositions made by Patton (2016) that address how the complexities of racism and White supremacy permeate the educational inequality in higher education,

Proposition 1: The establishment of U.S. higher education is deeply rooted in racism/White supremacy, the vestiges of which remain palatable.

Proposition 2: The functioning of U.S. higher education is intricately linked to imperialistic and capitalistic efforts that fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression.

Proposition 3: U.S. higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism/White supremacy is generated.

The participants in the study reflected on how their programs discussed matters of race through umbrella or vague terms without confronting the disparities in education, inequitable challenges faced by Black students in urban communities and failure to acknowledge the community's cultural wealth, the ways people in communities of color who live on the margins of society feel empowered (Love, 2019).

In addition, educators must challenge the everyday discourse of curriculum primarily centered on Eurocentric ideologies and the ideas of White males in academia and including only a small group of women and individuals from marginalized communities (Au et al., 2016).

Student teachers must challenge the discourse surrounding race and disabilities to understand how it serves as leverage and supports White students and as a disadvantage in Black students in

urban communities (Conner et al., 2008). Teachers must learn about the significant impact that Special Education has historically played on the lives of Black students with IEPs. Implications of this finding illustrate that disabilities focused on during teacher preparation programs impact predominantly White students. In contrast, disability classifications such as emotional disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and others are disproportionately classifications assigned to Black and Indigenous students. The structural and intentional barriers that have impacted Blacks in the United States historically through racism and ableism contribute to this unnerving truth of Black students' limited success in achieving postsecondary goals and achieving academic success. Ladson-Billings (2021) asserts that crucial first-century subject areas such as mathematics and science taught by unqualified and underqualified teachers are likelier to work in communities with poor students of color.

Educational Responsibilities for Black Students with Disabilities

This somewhat surprising finding of the study revealed that participants' perception of their ability to work with Black students with disabilities depended more on Black parents' willingness to accept or resist special education services, the socioeconomic status of families, and the level of parent involvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that teachers were more likely to blame students, the student's parents, the home environment, or the students' peers for the student's failure without the awareness or ability to reflect and consider that teachers also significantly influence students' achievement if they reported low self-efficacy and self-awareness to teach students effectively.

Parent involvement and the need to build relationships with parents were deemed highly important for participants in the study. Molly described that if she redesigned a teacher preparation program, a class on teachers' ability to speak to parents and understand family dynamics would better support students in school. Charles Bronson also expressed that teacher

preparation programs should include a course on family orientation and communicating with families. The participants highly valued building relationships and effectively communicating with parents. Jenna discussed how involvement in school activities beyond the classroom fosters relationships with parents, increasing student collaboration and class participation.

Compared to participants' descriptions of their student teaching experiences where White, Asian affluent, or middle-class parents advocated for their children's needs and understood the process of special education, the participants did not express a desire to have special skills when interacting with these groups of parents. Parents are often criticized for their nonparticipant or perceived lack of interest in their child's education (Deslandes et al., 2016; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). The participants of this study recognize that a different approach is needed when interacting with Black parents who are hesitant about the special education process and lack the advocacy skills required for navigating the educational setting. Prior literature suggests that it is essential that educators develop ways to build relationships with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to guide them, and create an environment in which they understand their children's special education needs (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Brandon et al., 2010; Cheatham & Lim-Mullins, 2018). Furthermore, the literature suggests that while all parents want their children to achieve their academic goals, African American parents are also included in that group in that they want to be involved in their children's education and want them to make strides academically (Brandon et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Thompson, 2003b).

While prior studies on teacher preparation programs found that they mainly focused on the theories and skills related to teaching, they were a narrow focus extended to learning about fostering partnerships and interpersonal skills to work with students and their parents (HiattMichael, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Robertson et al., 2017). Participants of this study suggest that courses on understanding family orientation and dynamics while building

relationships with Black and other culturally and linguistically diverse parents during teacher preparation are necessary to prepare new teachers for the classroom in urban communities. Schools must create policies that require parents, teachers, and educators to work together in partnership to build social capital for the benefit of students from all students, regardless of race and class.

Recommendations

These findings provide practitioners and policymakers with information that allows them to serve Black students with disabilities better and increase opportunities for positive postsecondary outcomes. Secondly, the results offer suggestions by new special education teachers that sustain and strengthen their confidence and self-efficacy in classrooms for teaching Black students. Finally, the findings of this study provide clear evidence of the need for teacher preparation programs to confront and address race, racism, and ableism. Teachers must be informed and educated about marginalized identity markers representative of students within all socioeconomics groups, specifically those of Black and disabled students who are multiply marginalized and impacted by low postsecondary outcomes.

Improved Curriculum and Student Teacher Experience

The study participants described the changes needed within teacher preparation and student teaching. First, participants said their professors discussed race through umbrella terms and vague blanket statements. Patton (2016) addressed ways in which institutions of higher learning further contribute to racism and White supremacy by knowingly avoiding discussions of inequities and disproportionality amongst Black students being referred to special education, making the least amount of progress while receiving special education, and attending low resourced schools it is a recipe for failure. The participants in the study shared that their perception of teaching compared to what they encounter daily in classrooms is "apples to

oranges." Teachers exposed to discourse and observation opportunities within Eurocentric middle- or upper-class communities; while being hired in urban low – middle-income communities with limited access to resources, special education teachers suggested that teacher preparation programs do a better job in providing them with diverse opportunities in various schools with students of varying demographics, resources, and disabilities.

In addition, these special education teachers completed programs with minimal knowledge and exposure to textbook knowledge or practical experience with students with varying needs and abilities. Therefore, when confronted with students with disabilities beyond autism or speech and language impairments, participants asserted they were unprepared to work with them. Mintz (2019) argued that new teachers experience uncertainty in their ability to teach special needs students because they require more time for thinking and deliberation since they focus on teaching rather than students' learning. As a result, the participants of this study focused more on parents than students when measuring their self-efficacy to support and educate the students in their classrooms. Cosier and Pearson (2016) indicated that many teacher education programs and faculty are unaware of the disability studies perspective, which focuses less on the medical-deficit views of students with disabilities. Valle and Connor (2011) described the need for teacher preparation programs to move away from the medical model that views disabilities as a fixable problem and instead prepare teachers to understand that the classroom and school environment must adapt to accommodate students' needs.

In-Service Support for Onboarding New Teachers

The study participants attributed their own will, mantras, and motivation to their classroom self-efficacy. They expressed their personal experiences and passion for teaching sustain them in the classroom. In addition, the participants shared that support such as mentors, coaches, veteran teacher support, and opportunities to collaborate with their fellow teachers also

provide a sense of confidence that they need to educate Black students with disabilities. The study participants suggested that in-service training is often not explicitly directed to support improving special education or the education of Black students. When provided with behavior support training and others they deemed beneficial, participants expressed that it helped them understand students' behaviors and provided proactive strategies. Hence, in-service training should not only consist of repetitive rhetoric but also of practical tools and supports needed for teachers to excel in their classrooms while supporting their students' academic success.

Conclusion

Black students with disabilities in the United States face systematic inequities and institutional barriers that inhibit their access to quality education (Banks et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2009). The disparities in education are evident in Black students' performance on standardized test scores, graduation rates, high dropout rates, low enrollment in postsecondary education, lower levels of academic success, and higher rates of college attrition (Hartney & Flavin, 2014; Taylor & King 2021; Wald & Losen, 2003).

This qualitative narrative inquiry design study included six special education teachers who work in urban communities teaching Black students with disabilities. Participants completed three phases of data collection. The theoretical framework utilized in my research is teacher-self efficacy theory and disability critical race theory (discrit). A qualitative study approach was most efficient for gaining knowledge of special education teachers' feelings of preparedness, specifically to educate Black youths with disabilities. Limited research on special education teachers' self-efficacy (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Incorporating the discrit theory as a framework, this study described how race and dis/ability intersect within classrooms across urban communities in the United States.

The narratives and stories the participants shared answered each research question. The findings described the special education teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and preparedness to teach Black students with disabilities. Their narratives reflected that their passion and love for teaching sustain and strengthen them for their daily work in the classroom. Building relationships with colleagues and families also supports and motivates them in school. The study participants expressed inadequate preparation for educating Black students with disabilities.

The participants provided a wish list in all the areas that teacher preparation programs must improve to ensure the smooth transition and preparation from higher education into classrooms servicing marginalized students with disabilities. Each participant in this study brought a unique perspective and shared their stories about their feelings of self-efficacy and preparation to educate Black students with disabilities. They described their passion for teaching and desire to improve students' growth as their most rewarding feeling regardless of their lack of preparation and learning experiences for the classroom. As I stand on the heels of my ancestors and earlier scholars in the field, this research is intended to highlight critical stories that will promote the progression of Black students with intersecting marginalized identities.

Limitations

This study sought to obtain six – eight participants. However, only six participants completed all three sections of the data collection process. Additionally, although the researcher intended to include teachers in PreK – 12th grade experience, the study participants taught PreK – 8th grade. As such, the voices of special education teachers working with 9th – 12th graders are not represented in this sample size to provide insight into teachers' self-efficacy at the high school level to educate Black students with disabilities. The participant pool also represented the voices of teachers who work within public schools in the United States. The voices of teachers who work in private and charter school settings are also not represented in this sample size,

which is a limitation of the study. Teachers' availability and the lack of time needed to carry out a longitudinal study that could add valuable data and insight into how teacher's self-efficacy developed over the years are also considered a research limitation.

In addition, participants included only the voices of teachers in their initial to fifth year of teaching. The voices of veteran teachers could have added valuable experiences and reflections about the day-to-day work with Black students in Special Education. Although not restricted to a specific state in the United States, obtaining participants from various states was a challenge and presented as a limitation of the study. Participants represented the New York State educators and did not include a varied sample of participants from the other areas. One participant from the Midwest completed the narrative essay; however, due to difficulty scheduling a time to conduct the interview, the participant was unable to complete the three data collection phases.

There was a total of two focus group interviews. Initially intended to be grouped by teaching grade level experience, focus groups were assigned based on the first three teachers who completed the narrative essays and one-on-one interviews. Focus group interviews occurred via the Zoom platform. Participants of focus group one participated in the interview one summer evening in July. The group consisted of Sister Mary Clarence, Marco, and Charles Bronson. Sister Mary Clarence joined from her phone off-camera while waiting for her son at baseball practice. Marco participated off-camera, and Charles Bronson participated on camera. I discussed the purpose of the focus group interview and informed them that they reached the final stage of the data collection process, and the researcher thanked them for their participation. They were encouraged to interject to share their thoughts after each question, and responses could be provided on a rotation, allowing each person time to respond to the questions proposed.

Throughout the interview, participants engaged through spontaneous feedback and on a rotation at times. Participants were allowed time to process each question, and depending on the level of engagement, the researcher allowed each participant to answer the question.

During the first focus group, participants openly shared their thoughts and reflections when asked about the advice they would give new teachers, the best advice given by veteran teachers, and their suggestions for the future of teacher preparation programs. Often, participants agreed with each other as they responded and even offered encouragement in a sense of camaraderie. The participants of the first focus group had just completed their first year of teaching at the time of the focus group; therefore, looking back on the reflective questions asked, they eagerly engaged and answered each question asked by the researcher.

Focus group two was conducted in August and included participants Jenna, Bob Mayer, and Molly. Each participant's teaching experience ranged from two – to five years. Bob Mayer participated with his video camera on. Molly and Jenna both had their cameras off. In contrast to focus group one, participants engaged in less spontaneous talk and responded mostly when the researcher guided the rotation of responses. It is important to note that focus group two occurred early one summer morning to accommodate Jenna's parental responsibilities. Molly joined the session approximately 15 minutes late, missing the first two questions. However, Molly completed the first two questions at the end of the focus group interview. Data regarding participants' advice to new teachers, the best advice given by veteran teachers, and suggestions to support new teachers working with Black students with disabilities were all gleaned from the data collected from the focus groups.

Although there were no significant differences in responses based on participants' written responses from their interviews, a few considerations potentially impacted how participants interacted during the focus group. Focus groups occurred during the summer, and the time of day

varied, one in the late evening and the other in the early morning, which could have impacted engagement. Some participants engaged with their cameras on while others participated offcamera. Due to participants' level of comfortability with sharing responses to research questions with strangers, some may have withheld more accurate responses. Lastly, if the assignment of participants in focus groups were by grade teaching experience, participants may have engaged with each other at a higher level.

As for my positionality and identity as a Black female school psychologist who works in an urban district, conducting research with special education teachers who work with Black students in urban communities allowed me to pursue the research through the lens of discrit and teacher self-efficacy theory. The research questions guided the study and provided insight into many of the questions I've had as a school psychologist over the past 11 years.

However, it is essential to note that as a Black educator and researcher who migrated to the United States as a child, using the word Black was intentional and was purposed to be inclusive to the entire Black diaspora as it highlights the diversity within the concept of racial identification. The inclusion of the whole Black diaspora is unique to my cultural identity. It signifies that Blackness and disabilities are not monoliths. As such, through teacher preparation and in the daily work of educators, students' cultural identities must be prioritized and included within the curriculum. Due to social desirability, participants responses may have potentially been impacted by my race.

As for the participants of the study, three of whom were White males and three of whom were Black females, my race and identity may have influenced their use of the word Black to identify the group of students discussed in the study. Based on the participants' level of comfortability due to their own racial identities, they referred to the population of students studied as "Black students," African Americans," and, at times, "those groups of students."

However, it is essential to note that participants, such as Sister Mary Clarence, shared her experiences as a Black educator working with Black students by highlighting the differences between herself and the Black students she taught. Bob Mayer indicated,

I guess the umbrella of teaching Black students is also pretty encompassing in the sense that in the first school, I taught in location A, most of those students predominantly are from the Caribbean. Now I'm at a school that has mostly Haitian students, and like, those are two different cultures, both Black, but it's like what might work for a Jamaican student might not work for a Haitian.

The study participants understood that there are variations in Blackness and that the needs of Black students differed from one student to the next. As a researcher, the race of participants was not a variable for participating because I also understand that teachers of all races work with Black students, and research focused on the population of students served, not on the races of the participants but on understanding how they were prepared to work with the diversity of Black students with disabilities. Black students with disabilities reside in urban, suburban, and even rural areas of America. Therefore, teacher preparation programs must train teachers to meet the needs of all students with intersecting identities in various geographical locations, mainly because disparities in special education exist in rural, urban, and suburban communities (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021).

Future Research

This study lends to several implications for future research. Since the participants of this study were in their first to fifth year of teaching, a follow-up study within five years would be beneficial to understand how their views on the contributing factors of their self-efficacy for educating Black students in special education changed. The participants offered insight into their teacher preparation and student teaching experience; however, with a follow-up study,

participants could provide more experience about their in-service support, which may offer support to new teachers in the field.

A study exploring administrators' knowledge and understanding of the impact of special education for Black students and their relationships with new and veteran special education teachers will provide insight to improve the level of support administrators provide within their school communities. The participants of this study expressed that, dependent on the administrator's knowledge of resources and teaching strategies, it impacts their overall experience in the classroom and their ability to be creative while addressing the needs of their students. While there is an assumption that when a teacher completes a teacher preparation program, they are qualified to teach, it is the responsibility of school administrators to hire and retain qualified teachers for students. By conducting further research with administrators and special educators, additional findings may yield an understanding of why the postsecondary outcomes for Black students with disabilities differ more than students in other ethnic groups (NCES, 2021).

Lastly, research involving teacher educators would also be beneficial to understanding their role and position in preparing educators to teach Black students with disabilities in urban communities. Examining deeper context, professional development, and general discourse of their practice and leadership will provide essential information toward more significant knowledge of special education teachers' classroom preparation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



**MOLLOY
UNIVERSITY**

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Patricia A. Eckardt, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy University Institutional Review Board
Professor, Barbara H. Hagan School of Nursing and Health Sciences
E: peckardt@molloy.edu
T: 516.323.3711

DATE: April 12, 2023

TO: Alana Andrews
FROM: Molloy University IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [2032456-1] Voices of Special Educators: The Stories and Experiences in Teaching Black Students with Disabilities.

REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: April 12, 2023
EXPIRATION DATE: April 11, 2024
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time (10 business days) for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 11, 2024.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Eckardt at 516-323-3711 or peckardt@molloy.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy University Institutional Review Board

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Molloy University IRB's records.

Appendix B: Narrative Story – Reflection Essay

Think about your teacher preparation program and your current teaching experience. Reflect and write a story to yourself as if you were a student in your teacher preparation program. Knowing what you know now, what, if anything would you have changed about the program? Consider what supports and experiences have prepared you and contributed to your sense of self-efficacy in the classroom. What program preparation and/or training would best prepare you for working with Black students with disabilities receiving special education services?

The minimum word count for the narrative essay is 500 words and the maximum word count is 1200 words.

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

What is your race/ethnicity? Check all that apply.

☐ Indigenous

☐ Asian

☐ Black or African American

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐ Hispanic or Latino

☐ White

☐ Multiracial

☐ Other (please describe): _____

Type of Special Education Teacher Certification:

Describe the type of college/university you attended, for example (private, public, community etc.)

Did your teacher preparation program include an Urban Strand?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Current Teaching Assignment:

How many Black students do you teach currently?

- ☐ 0 – 5
- ☐ 6 – 10
- ☐ 11 or more

Please identify the disability categories of the students you teach.

- ☐ Specific Learning Disability
- ☐ Other Health Impairment
- ☐ Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ☐ Emotional Disturbance
- ☐ Speech or Language Impairment
- ☐ Visual Impairment, including blindness.
- ☐ Deafness
- ☐ Hearing Impairment
- ☐ Deaf blindness
- ☐ Orthopedic Impairment
- ☐ Intellectual Disability

☐ Traumatic Brain Injury

☐ Multiple Disabilities

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

- 1.Can you tell me about your background and why you chose to go into special education?
- 2.Briefly describe your teacher preparation program.
- 3.How did your teacher preparation program discuss disabilities?
- 4.How did your teacher preparation program discuss race?
- 5.How confident did you feel during the first year of having your own classroom?
- 6.How did your student teaching experience compare to your first few years in a school setting?
- 7.Describe any prior or current experiences of teaching Black students with disabilities in special education.
- 8.If you were designing a teacher preparation program for aspiring special education teachers, describe how you would prepare teachers for the experiences with Black students in special education.
- 9.Describe what experiences would prepare and encourage teachers in the field for day-to-day work in classroom teaching Black students with disabilities.
- 10.Describe how confident your teaching preparation program and professional development opportunities have made you feel to teach Black students with disabilities.

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. What is the best advice given to you by a veteran teacher about being a special education teacher?
2. What advice would you give to a new special education teacher?
3. What do you think is needed to improve teacher preparation programs?
4. What type of support would you implement in a school for new special education teachers working with Black students with disabilities?
5. Where do you think the future of teacher preparation programs is headed?
6. What suggestions do you have for teacher preparation programs to prepare special education teachers for the workplace?

Appendix F – Recruitment Flyer

Are you a state certified special education teacher in your 1st – 5th year of teaching?

Do you teach in an Urban School setting?

Do you teach Black students with Disabilities?

Are you interested in participating in a study that aims to hear your voice as a teacher about your teacher preparation program and ongoing in-service training that prepared you to educate Black students with disabilities?

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the stories and reflections of special education teachers' preparation and perception of their self-efficacy for educating Black students with disabilities. This study will examine the influence of teacher preparation programs and ongoing in-service professional development on their experiences.

What will the study involve?

Participate in the study over the course of 3 sessions to complete (1) narrative essay, which participants can complete on their own time and submit to PI (2) One on one interviews will last up to 1 – 2 hours (3) Focus group interviews will last 1 - 2 hours. The duration of the study is 3 months.

To participate you must:

- Be a state certified special education teacher.

- Teach Black students with disabilities.
- Teach in an urban community in the United States.
- Must be in your initial to 5th year of teaching since graduating from a teacher preparation program.

This study is being conducted with approval from Molloy University. For more information or to volunteer to participate, please call (347) 832-5653 or email aandrews@lions.molloy.edu

Appendix G: Participant Demographic

Participant Name	Race	Type of Teacher Certification	Type of College/University attended	Did teacher preparation program include an Urban Strand?	Current Teaching Assignment	# of Black students currently teaching	Disability classification of students currently teaching
Sister Mary Clarence	Black or African American	Special Education Grades 1 - 6	Private Christian School - Online	No	4 th /5 th grade self-contained	6 - 10	Specific Learning Disability Emotional Disturbance Speech or Language Impairment
Charles Bronson	White	Dual Certification Grades 1 - 6	Public University	"I believe so"	3 rd grade Integrated Co-Teaching class (ICT)	11 or more	Specific Learning Disability Speech or Language Impairment
Marco	White	Special Education Grades 1 - 6	Public University	No	4 th /5 th grade self-contained	6 - 10	Autism Speech or Language Impairment Multiple Disabilities
Bob Mayer	White and Multiracial	Special Education Grades 7 - 12	Private University	No	6 - 8 th grade Integrated Co-Teacher class (ICT)	11 or more	Specific Learning Disabilities Other Health Impairment Speech or Language Impairment
Molly	Black or African American	Special Education Birth - 2 nd grade	Private University	No	PreK self-contained	11 or more	Preschooler with a Disability Autism Spectrum Disorder
Jenna	Black or African American	Special Education Grades 1 - 6	Private University	Yes "African American professors tailored it the best they could"	2 nd grade Integrated Co-Teaching class (ICT)	11 or more	Specific Learning Disability Emotional Disturbance Speech or Language Impairment

Appendix H: Codes to Categories

Teacher Wish List for Future Preparation

- Future preparation
- Reimagining preparation
- AI Future Preparation
- In-Service Recommendations
- New Teacher Advice

Covid Implications

- Digital world
- Innovation and Creativity
- AI Future Preparation

Teacher Perception of Experience: Training Contradiction “Oxymoron”

- “It’s different”
- In-service reality
- Textbook: Theory vs. Practical
- Resources
- Teacher Preparation
- Lack of preparation
- Teacher Reflections

Special Education Services in Classrooms of Black students with Disabilities

- Disabilities
- IEP
- Administration
- Resources
- Classroom Observation and Preparation
- Prior Experience
- Classroom Challenges

Sustainable Mindset of New Teachers

- Self-efficacy
- Confidence
- Mantras
- Perseverance
- Beyond the classroom

External School Supports

- Seek resources
- Collaboration
- Fostering relationships with colleagues
- Organization and planning
- Mentor
- Veteran Advice

Characteristics of Teacher Preparation Programs

- Fostering Growth
- Urban Strand
- Discussion of disabilities
- Discussion of race
- Student teaching
- Lack of preparation

Race Matters: Racial Stereotypes

- Diversity
- Black Diaspora
- Black students
- Race Reference
- Aptitude and Attitude
- SES
- Parenting

Parent Involvement is an Educational Responsibility

- Parent teacher relationship
- Parent teacher communication
- Black student parenting
- Black student SES