A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF RACIAL MINORITY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A RURAL MIDWESTERN DISTRICT

A Dissertation by

Mark Allan Whitener

Bachelor of Arts in Education, Baptist Christian University, 1985

Masters of Education, Wichita State University, 2003

Submitted to the Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership,
Educational and School Psychology
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

May 2014

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF RACIAL MINORITY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN A RURAL MIDWESTERN DISTRICT

The following faculty members have examined the full copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

_____
Jean Patterson, Committee Chair

_____
Linda Bakken, Committee Member

_____
Michael Birzer, Committee Member

_____
Patrick Terry, Committee Member

_____
Susan Unruh, Committee Member

Accepted for the College of Education

_____
Shirley Lefever-Davis, Interim Dean

Accepted for the Graduate School

_____
Abu S.M. Masud, Interim Dean

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work foremost to my beautiful wife, Teresa. She has supported me

throughout this process and encouraged me to complete my research. She is truly one of

the greatest public school teachers I've ever known. Indeed no one advocates for

students with disabilities more than Teresa. Secondly I dedicate this work to my parents,

Dr. C.L. and Lyda Whitener. They both instilled in me the importance of education and

without their insistence, I would have dropped out of school in 7th grade. Thirdly, I

recognize my wonderful children. They have each grown into wonderfully

compassionate men and women. They make me proud every day. Finally, I dedicate this

work to my amazing grandmother June. She was an advocate for inclusionary education

before most students with disabilities were granted access to public schools. In 1944, she

insisted her disabled daughter, Faye be allowed to attend public school along side my

mother. Faye attended school in the regular classroom all through elementary school.

June is my hero, and her advocacy for Faye encouraged me to also seek equity for

students with disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. Jean Patterson for her support, encouragement, and mentoring.

Dr. Patterson is the epitome of a constructivist teacher. She promotes educational equity

for all students through her tireless work training school leaders. Dr. Patterson has

earned my deepest respect and gratitude.

ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly, public schools in the United States have made tremendous progress over the last four decades in providing an equitable education for students with disabilities. Prior to the passage of federal law in 1975, many "handicapped" children were either denied access to schooling altogether, or received inadequate, educational services in a segregated setting. Today, over six million students with disabilities attend regular schools alongside their abled peers. However, some minority students with disabilities, including African American, Native American, and Hispanic students, continue to receive segregated, inequitable educational services at rates significantly higher than other groups. This study examines the perceptions minority students with disabilities have about their access to equitable educational services.

The framework supporting this study emanates from a critical tradition. A critical perspective uses critique as the primary means to identify the marginalization of non-dominant groups. When students are given a voice, they are able to challenge assumptions and stereotypes held by adults, and they become empowered to resist marginalization. For this study, I interviewed four minority students with disabilities, and used the constant comparative method to analyze the participants' perceptions about their educational experiences. Implications from the research stress the need to give minority students with disabilities a greater voice in their educational services. Providing for student voice is the first step in ensuring equitable educational experiences for minority students with disabilities (National Education Association, 2007).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Much progress has been made toward providing an equitable education for students with disabilities in United States public schools since 1975 when Congress passed the landmark Education for All Handicapped Act (EHA) (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). EHA was the first in a succession of federal legislation designed to increase access to public schooling and the regular education curriculum for students with disabilities (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). Prior to the passage of EHA, one million students with disabilities in the United States were excluded from public schools, while another 3.5 million received inadequate services, often in segregated settings (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001; Wakelin, 2008).

For the first time, EHA guaranteed students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (Education of all Handicapped Act, 1975; Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). However, in response to EHA, many public schools created a dual educational system where students with disabilities were educated in self-contained classrooms or separate schools (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Once placed in separate programs, students with disabilities would only gain access to the regular education class when they demonstrated a skill level equivalent to their abled peers (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). EHA was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with the intended outcome of giving students with disabilities greater access to regular schools (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990).

IDEA and its successive reauthorization in 1997 represented a major shift in thinking about how students with disabilities in the United States should be educated. Under IDEA, the central focus was no longer on the child's handicap but on providing access to a regular education (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Furthermore, under IDEA special education would no longer be

1

considered a place, but as a scaffold to support students with disabilities in the general education setting (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990). While IDEA did increase access to regular schools, the dual educational system remained intact for many students with disabilities (Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

In 1997, with the reauthorization of IDEA, Congress once again addressed the segregation of students with disabilities within public schools (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). The revised provisions required schools to give students with disabilities the opportunity to attend classes alongside their abled peers (Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, 1997). While the 1997 reauthorization gave students with disabilities unprecedented access to the regular classroom, many schools failed to significantly narrow the academic achievement gap between students with disabilities and their abled peers (United States Department of Education, 2002a).

In 2001 Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to address the achievement of all students (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). NCLB also focused on historically underachieving groups including students with disabilities, and schools were required to increase the academic achievement of special education children or face sanctions (Reder, 2007). However, the provisions of IDEA guaranteeing increased access to the regular classroom would prove insufficient to ensure students with disabilities would make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as required by the No Child Left Behind legislation (Reder, 2007).

Most recently, in 2004, IDEA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). This reauthorization aligned IDEA with the provisions in NCLB (Turnbull, 2005). IDEIA focused on improving educational services for disabled students by requiring special

2

education teachers to be highly qualified, and by aligning goals and assessments on students'
Individual Education Plans (IEP) with their instructional needs (Individuals with Disabilities
Education Improvement Act, 2004). Additionally, IDEIA strengthened students with disabilities
rights to due process.

As a result of EHA and successive legislation including IDEA, NCLB, and IDEIA,
currently over 6 million students with disabilities attend public schools in the United States with
the majority included in regular classrooms (United States Department of Education, 2010).
However, many minority students with disabilities, especially African American, Hispanic, and
Native American children continue to be segregated in special education programs at rates
significantly higher than their white peers (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Skiba et al., 2008). Just as
the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 "separate is not equal," the segregation of minority students
with disabilities creates significant educational and social inequity (Boone & King-Berry, 2007).

Research Problem

After four decades of litigation and federal legislation in the United States designed to
give students with disabilities equal access to public schooling, many minority students with
disabilities continue to have inequitable educational opportunities (Pugach, 2001; Theoharis,
2007; Wakelin, 2008). In fact, some minority disabled groups, including African American,
Hispanic and Native American students, continue to receive educational services in a largely
segregated setting (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). The segregation of minority special education
students creates the potential for a significant achievement gap and eventual diminished societal
attainment (Morgan, Frisco, Farkas, & Hibel, 2008). These inequities are especially conspicuous
in the overrepresentation of minority students in special education, and in the significant

3

achievement gap that exists between minority students with disabilities and their white peers (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Skiba, et al., 2008). Further evidence of this inequity includes higher dropout and expulsion rates, and significantly lower graduation rates among disabled minorities (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007; Morgan, et al., 2008; Skiba, et al., 2008; Wakelin, 2008).

Today the majority of special education students in the United States have access to regular neighborhood schools, virtually unheard of only a few decades ago. Yet, while inclusion, the practice of allowing students with disabilities to attend regular education classes, is more prevalent, many African American, Hispanic, and Native American students with disabilities continue to spend much of the day segregated from their abled peers (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Theoharis, 2007; United States Department of Education, 2002a). In fact, data from the United States Department of Education concluded some groups of minority students with disabilities are twice as likely to be segregated from the regular education classroom than their white counterparts (United States Department of Education, 2002b). Once a minority student with disabilities is segregated from the regular school population, access to rigorous curriculum and highly qualified teachers is significantly limited (Mckinley, Jones, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007).

For decades, research has indicated minority students with disabilities' level of access to rigorous instruction, the regular education curriulum, and highly qualified teachers differs significantly from their white peers (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Baker, 1995; Mckinley, et al., 2007; Vallas, 2009). In fact, even when included in the regular education classroom, minority students with disabilities are more likely to be pulled to the back of the class or to an alternate classroom by a paraprofessional and provided with less rigorous assignments (Baglieri & Knopf,

4

2004; Mckinley, et al., 2007; National Education Association, 2007). Further compounding the access gap to rigorous instruction, minority students with disabilities often experience the curriculum at a much slower pace than their white peers (Vallas, 2009). With less access to rigorous curriculum and highly qualified teachers, juxtaposed with a slower pace of instruction, minority students with disabilities achieve at levels significantly lower than their white peers, virtually ensuring eventual economic disparity (Vallas, 2009).

Minority students with disabilities also experience increased social isolation within the school setting (Vallas, 2009). Evidence of this isolation includes the near absence of minority students with disabilities on student councils, and their limited participation in civic and social organizations within schools (Morgan, et al., 2008). Minority students with disabilities are also suspiciously absent from extracurricular activities, including athletics and performing arts programs (Morgan, et al., 2008). Ultimately, isolation silences students with disabilities voices and their ability to disrupt inequitable conditions (Giroux, 1991).

Contemporary critical researchers have argued minority students with disabilities are effectively silenced in public schools (Mitra, 2007; Pugach, 2001; Theoharis, 2007). This silencing of minority students with disabilities through segregation and social isolation is institutionalized in schools and such silence excludes the experiences and histories of special education students (Giroux, 1991). The consequence of obscuring the experiences and histories of marginalized populations, including minority students with disabilities, is inequality becomes a normal and accepted occurrence (Dant, 2003) resulting in further inequity and oppression (Giroux, 2000; Pugach, 2001; Theoharis, 2007). Also, historical stereotypes purport students with disabilities cannot add value to society, further validating the silence (Davis, Corker, &

Shakespeare, 2003). Indeed, rather than having a voice, it is far more likely adults, including

parents, educators, and researchers, speak on the students' behalf without truly understanding

their perspectives (Fielding, 2001). When adults speak for students with disabilities, their

isolation, silence, and objectification are increased (Barron, 2000).

However, when students are given a voice, they are able to challenge assumptions and

stereotypes held by adults. They also no longer have to be objects of study to be acted upon, but

are subjects, empowered to resist the marginalization of the dominant class (hooks, 1989;

Kirshner & O'Donoghue, 2001). Furthermore, allowing for student voice increases equality and

access to the same experiences and opportunities regular education students enjoy (hooks, 1989;

Pugach, 2001).

There have been limited attempts to listen to special education students in an effort

to highlight inequitable educational experiences. However, more often teachers presume

to know the educational needs of minority students with disabilities without asking for

their input (Pugach, 2001). Artiles (2000) asserted silence characterizes the discourse on

educational issues related to minority students with disabilities while Rioux (1999)

proposed society accepts some students, such as minority children with disabilities, as less

worthy of receiving rigorous instruction. Such silence and attitudes create inequity where

the minority disabled often have fewer educational resources (Brayboy, Castago, &

Maughan, 2007). Therefore, if minority students with disabilities are to be afforded

educational equity, they must be asked to explain their experiences; they must be given a

voice (hooks, 1989). This research gave a voice to minority students with disabilities.

Through individual interviews, the research participants were allowed to disrupt the silence and challenge the assumptions adults hold about their educational experiences and needs.

Theoretical Framework

The framework supporting this study emanates from a critical tradition. A critical viewpoint encompasses many divergent theories and practices, all related through societal critique as the primary means to identify the marginalization of non-dominant groups. Inequality, oppression, and injustice are a pervasive and accepted part of society, and as such critical research identifies structures of oppression and marginalization through open critique (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005). For this study, the non-dominant group of interest was minority students with disabilities, including African American, Native American, and Hispanic students. Educational research using a critical perspective typically seeks to highlight institutional policies and practices that reproduce experiences of oppression in the school setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Consequently, critical social theory provided the overarching framework for this study. Critical social theory seeks institutional change through a discourse that exposes domination rooted in issues related to gender, race, and disability (Leonardo, 2004). Situated within critical social theory, critical disability theory provided a praxis connecting a critical theoretical perspective to the lived experiences of students in special education.

Critical Social Theory

Critical social theory evolved during the 1920's and 1930's from scholars associated with the Institute for Social Research located at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. The Institute, or Frankfurt School, as it was commonly known, was founded by Felix Weil (Crotty, 1998). Weil was especially interested in the study of Marxism; however, political, economic,

and social upheaval during this time eventually shifted the focus of the Frankfurt School from socialism to a broader perspective on society and culture (Crotty, 1998). Critical social theorists associated with the University of Frankfort included Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer (Crotty, 1998). These early critical social theorists found traditional interpretive theory to be apathetic, formulaic, and insufficient to explain how power and oppression influence the experiences of marginalized populations. Therefore, they envisioned critical social theory as a more dynamic, evolving, and responsive theory capable of explaining how dominant groups produce and use knowledge to maintain power over marginalized groups (Crotty, 1998; Dant, 2003; Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005).

While a critical social perspective may represent many different theoretical constructs, contemporary critical social theories share several common tenets. Central to a critical social perspective is the continual critique of social and cultural structures and how these structures support unjust and inequitable practices (Crotty, 1998; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). It is only through such critique that transformational change occurs. Furthermore, critical social theory is especially useful in explaining how issues of poverty, gender, race, and disability influence the ways knowledge and power are produced, disseminated, and maintained in social and education organizations (Leonardo, 2004).

A natural function of all systems is knowledge production, and knowledge is often created in ways that obscure oppressive practices in society or institutions such as schools (Dant, 2003). Because knowledge created by unjust systems is so enmeshed in institutions, people do not always recognize these practices as oppressive (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Therefore, the experiences and values of non-dominant groups, such as individuals with disabilities, become

8

obscured, excluded, or dismissed altogether as not having value (Dant, 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010).

The literature clearly shows minority students with disabilities are one group that often has their experiences distorted and dismissed in the school setting, resulting in further inequality and oppression (Giroux, 2000; Pugach, 2001; Theoharis, 2007). The consequence of obscuring the experiences of minority students with disabilities is inequity becomes a normal and accepted occurrence in schools. As these occurrences become normalized, a hegemonic discourse is achieved, and "people tend to view [inequity] as reflections, rather than constructions of reality thus misperceiving their arbitrary as well as social nature" (Jordan, 2012, p.112). One solution is to engage minority students with disabilities in an ideological critique that reflects their daily experiences and emphasizes how oppressive practices developed within a historical context (Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001). Critical disability theory is a complementary perspective with an explicit focus on with how power is used to marginalize persons with disabilities (Griffin-Basas, 2008).

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory (CDT) asserts awareness of oppressive structures is not the primary objective, but rather transformation of institutional structures that create oppression. CDT is concerned not only with identifying sources of oppression, but how such oppression can be eliminated (Griffin-Basas, 2008).

Critical disability theory departs from a traditional view of disability as an unfortunate anomalous physical or cognitive variation from the norm. Rather, critical disability theorists posit disability is a construction of society; specifically, the environment, not the anomaly,

9

creates disability. A disabling environment includes physical space, attitudes, ideology, and dogma (Hoskings, 2008).

Some critical disability theorists have posited capitalist ideology promotes a disabling environment for different abled persons (Erevelles, 2000). Capitalists measure the value of human worth based on an individual's ability to produce economic value. Some groups are considered to have inherently greater capacity to produce economic value and therefore are privileged above groups with less economic potential (Erevelles, 2000; Nibert, 1995). Disabled individuals and especially minority disabled are not generally regarded for their ability to produce economic value but rather are seen from a capitalist viewpoint as a drain on society through their participation in and dependency on the welfare state (Davis, et al., 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). A capitalist viewpoint of human worth related to an individual's ability to create wealth permeates many educational institutions and explains in many cases the inferior educational experiences provided to minority students with disabilities (Erevelles, 2000).

Critical disability theory posits in many schools, abled students are afforded the best teachers, the best facilities, and the best programs. These students are privileged to ensure their future potential to add economic value to society (Erevelles, 2000). Although the data support inclusive practices as beneficial for all students (Wagner, 1989), in many schools abled students are kept separate from minority students with disabilities.   Some parents and educators have argued an inclusive environment disadvantages abled students and jeopardizes the economic future of "normal" children. Since minority students with disabilities are not valued for their potential to create wealth, unqualified teachers, inadequate facilities, and segregated programs

are considered in many cases as sufficient if not appropriate for minority special education students (Erevelles, 2000).

Critical disability theory seeks to discredit the conception that students with disabilities cannot add value to society, thereby indicting practices that create and validate oppression (Hoskings, 2008). CDT accomplishes this goal by privileging stories of the disabled above the observations and interpretations of abled researchers; when others tell the stories of students with disabilities, the effect is objectification, silence, and increased segregation (Davis, et al., 2003). For this study, CDT provided a framework that brings to the forefront the educational experiences of minority students with disabilities. Students were empowered to tell the stories of their experiences in their own voice. The educational policies and programs provided to students in special education were analysed from the perspective of the students, not from the viewpoint of parents, or other adults within the schools (Hoskings, 2008).

The following chapter is a review of the literature documenting the struggle to obtain equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities. The chapter will examine the evolution of federal legislation and educational practices implemented in United States public schools over the last 4 decades.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions minority students with disabilities have about their educational experiences. Participants' stories about their lived experiences may provide educators with new insights leading to improved educational services for minority students in special education. Questions guiding this study are:

1. How do minority students with disabilities describe their school experiences?

2. How do minority students with disabilities describe their opportunities to participate in the larger school community?

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This review of the literature includes a number of topics relevant to the study of minority students with disabilities. It begins with the historical context of students with disabilities and their advocates to gain equal access to public schooling in the United States. Landmark court cases and federal legislation designed to make appropriate educational services more accessible to students with disabilities are highlighted. The review concludes with an examination of the contemporary struggle of minority students with disabilities to gain equal access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Historical and Legal Context of Special Education in the United States

Historical accounts of early court cases and federal legislation described a complex struggle between advocates seeking FAPE for students with disabilities, and those wary of including special education students with "normal" children (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001; Turnbull, 2005). The literature also indicated some minority students with disabilities continue to be denied equal access to FAPE (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; United States Department of Education, 2002a). The first major court case seeking FAPE for students with disabilities was filed in 1971.

In 1971, the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children (PARC) filed a lawsuit seeking guaranteed educational services for students with disabilities (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a class action suit filed in federal district court, successfully targeted the systematic exclusion of mentally retarded children from Pennsylvania public schools (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Prior to the PARC lawsuit, mentally retarded children in Pennsylvania had no legal right to educational and rehabilitative services and

therefore were routinely denied access to public schools (United States Department of Education, 2010). Reminiscent of Brown v. the Board of Education, the plaintiffs in PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania argued it was unconstitutional to deny students with disabilities access to public schooling based on the Equal Protection Clause in the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, which prohibits arbitrary discrimination against groups of people (Boone & King-Berry, 2007; Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

The PARC case established two key principles that would become the foundation for successive federal legislation including the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and the right to due process (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). PARC generated national attention to the plight of students with disabilities, and soon after the plaintiffs' victory, a second lawsuit, Mills v. the District of Columbia, sought FAPE and due process for all students with disabilities in D.C. public schools (Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

Mills v. the District of Columbia Board of Education was a class action suit filed in 1972 on behalf of 7 African American students with disabilities (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). According to the plaintiffs, students with disabilities in D.C. public schools were routinely labeled as mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and behaviorally disordered without due process. Once students with disabilities were labeled, they were often excluded, expelled, or segregated from the regular population (Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

Expanding on the PARC decision, the court ruled D.C. public schools could not reject any child regardless of his or her disability. The Mills' ruling also guaranteed FAPE for all D.C. students with disabilities, not just those labeled as mentally retarded (United States Department of Education, 2010). Furthermore, under Mills, parents and students were guaranteed due

14

process rights. These rights included written notice of educational placement meetings, the right

to protest educational decisions, and the right to an impartial hearing to appeal educational

placement decisions (Boone & King-Berry, 2007). The guarantee of FAPE and due process in

Mills foreshadowed future federal legislative efforts to guarantee equal access for all students

with disabilities in the United States, and paved the way for the passage of the Education of all

Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975 (Zigmond et al., 1995).

Federal Legislation

The following section examines federal legislation that has significantly influenced the

educational opportunities of students with disabilities. This legislation includes the Education of

all Handicapped Children (EHA), 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 1997, 1990,

2004), and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. EHA was the first federal legislation designed

to guarantee the right for students with disabilities to be educated at public expense (Kozleski &

Smith, 2005).

EHA. In 1975, the United States Congress addressed the educational disparity of

students with disabilities with the passage of the Education of all Handicapped Children Act

(EHA), better known at the time as P.L. 94-142 (Education of all Handicapped Act, 1975). Prior

to the passage of EHA, access to public schooling was limited for students with disabilities, and

the literature characterized the education of students with disabilities who were afforded an

education as hidden away from the public in the classroom down the hall (Handler, 2007; United

States Department of Education, 1997; Zigmond, et al., 1995). EHA was the first federal effort

to protect the civil rights of students with disabilities and had a significant positive effect on

students with disabilities throughout the United States by guaranteeing FAPE (United States

Department of Education, 2010). The law specifically targeted two groups of students with disabilities; those who had been completely excluded and those who were underserved in public schools. Before the passage of EHA at least one million students with disabilities were completely excluded from a public education, and over half of all other students with disabilities had limited access to appropriate educational and rehabilitative services (United States Department of Education, 2010).

EHA also sought to make significant improvements in how students with disabilities were served in public schools (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). The routine labeling of students with disabilities as mentally retarded or behavior disordered noted in the PARC and Mills suits was widespread throughout the U.S (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Consequently, once students were labeled, schools often segregated students with disabilities from the regular population or denied them services altogether (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Furthermore, such labeling and placement often took place without parental knowledge or consent. The law gave protection or due process to students and parents by guaranteeing their right to a say in educational decisions affecting their special education services (Bryant, 1998). Due process also afforded students and parents a hearing if they disagreed with an educational decision, and the right to appeal such educational decisions in state and federal courts (Bryant, 1998). Finally, the law established processes for identifying and educating special education students and for the evaluation of these processes (United States Department of Education, 2010).

While EHA dramatically increased access to public education for students with disabilities, the law did not end the segregation of students with disabilities nor did it open the doors of all public schools to special education students (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). However,

EHA did serve as an impetus for the continued and rigorous debate on improving educational opportunities for all students with disabilities (Smith & Erevelles, 2004). In 1990, EHA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (United States Department of Education, 2010). IDEA and subsequent amendments in 1997 and 2004 represented a significant philosophical shift in how students with disabilities would be educated (Turnbull, 2005).

IDEA 1990. In 1990, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was enacted in part to assist states in educating students with disabilities and to strengthen earlier provisions in EHA designed to protect the civil rights of students with disabilities and their parents (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). To this extent, IDEA provided federal funding for special education programs and likewise mandated how students with disabilities would be identified, placed, and educated in public schools (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990; Katsiyannis, et al., 2001; Turnbull, 2005). Key provisions in IDEA addressed cessation of FAPE through exclusionary discipline practices (Turnbull, 2005).

The cornerstone of special education law beginning in the 1970's was FAPE. Prior to the passage of IDEA, many students with severe disabilities were completely excluded from U.S. regular neighborhood public schools (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). Two such groups especially vulnerable to exclusion from schooling were students with significant emotional disabilities (ED) and those with behavioral disabilities (BD) (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). While IDEA guaranteed FAPE for all students, many schools supplanted the law by using discipline to keep "dangerous" students with disabilities from attending classes (Turnbull, 2005). These "dangerous" students by and large were minorities (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). However, IDEA contained a zero reject provision. Many courts and advocates for students with disabilities argued the "zero reject"

17

provision protected all students with disabilities from termination of services through disciplinary means (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001).

As IDEA opened the doors of public schools to all children, regardless of their disability, some parents and educators began to question the rationale for including students with significant behavioral disabilities alongside "normal students" (Bryant, 1998). Further empowering the anti FAPE movement, in 1994, Congress passed the Gun Free School Act that allowed for the expulsion of any student bringing a gun into a public school (Bryant, 1998). The contradictory requirements of the two laws created a rift between administrators who expelled student with disabilities for "dangerous" acts, and those who refused to allow the clock to turn back to a time when students with behavioral and emotional difficulties were denied access to an appropriate education (Bryant, 1998). The reauthorization of IDEA would address the seemingly continual struggle for some groups of students with disabilities to gain FAPE.

IDEA 1997. The 1997 revision of IDEA was a major overhaul of the law and was designed to further strengthen FAPE (Klotz & Nealis, 2005). Issues addressed in the revision included but were not limited to over identification of students for disability services, improvements to due process, and access to rigorous instruction.

Over identification. Prior to IDEA many students with disabilities fell through the cracks as schools failed to systematically identify students in need of special education services (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). However, under IDEA, as schools were required to locate and evaluate all children ages 3 to 21 with disabilities, the pendulum swung and students were over identified for services (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). Over identification represented an effort by some regular educators to rid schools of "problem students" including minority children (Bryant,

18

1998). In fact, minority students bore the brunt of this over identification in many schools as some minority groups were disproportionately identified as mentally handicapped or behaviorally disordered (Fusarelli, 1999; Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Skiba, et al., 2008).

IDEA 1997 addressed over identification through standardized protocol for the identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, 1997). The law required valid, standardized assessments administered by qualified personnel be used to measure students' developmental, functional, and academic levels (Apling & Jones, 2008). Additionally, as part of this standardization, the pre-referral process was established and required schools to implement significant research-based interventions guided by rigorous formative assessments. This process was implemented to avoid unnecessary placement of students in special education (Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, 1997; Klotz & Nealis, 2005).

Procedural protection. The 1997 revision further strengthened a student's right to due process by providing for the inclusion of parents in any meeting where determination of services is discussed (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). When interventions implemented through the pre-referral process proved unsuccessful, the law required eligibility to be determined by an interdisciplinary team of professional educators (Katsiyannis, et al., 2001). This interdisciplinary team was expanded in the 1997 revision of IDEA to include parents (Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, 1997). Indeed, the law required parental consent before a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services is administered (Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, 1997).

Access to rigorous instruction. Initially, IDEA focused on providing students with disabilities access to public schools. However, as IDEA evolved, the emphasis expanded its definition of access to not only include access to public schools, but to the regular education curriculum (Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010). According to Cooper-Duffy et al, (2010), access defined by IDEA meant more than mere exposure to the regular education curriculum; students with disabilities were to have access to the regular education experience. This experience would include access to highly qualified teachers and a rigorous curriculum (Kozleski & Smith, 2005) experienced not down the hall in a segregated class, but alongside regular education peers (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). Furthermore, schools were not only required to give students with disabilities access to the regular education experience, but for the first time schools were held accountable for their progress and academic achievement (Cooper-Duffy, et al., 2010; United States Department of Education, 2010).

However, according to Handler (2007) one decade after passage of IDEA at least one quarter of all students with disabilities continued to spend the majority of the day in segregated classes where they often failed to meet academic proficiency. Even federal legislation seemingly failed to significantly improve the educational experience of many students with disabilities. Nonetheless, driven by the accountability movement, the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) required schools to ensure all students reach academic proficiency, and in theory gave greater access to the regular education experience for students with disabilities (Turnbull, 2009).

NCLB. The pressure on schools for greater accountability for the achievement of all students, including students with disabilities, was intensified with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Reder, 2007). The NCLB Act mandated all students be

20

proficient on standardized assessments by the year 2014 or schools would be subject to sanctions and potentially the loss of federal education dollars (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Even though NCLB was not a special education law, provisions in the law mandating academic proficiency for all students measured against the regular education standards-based curriculum had a significant affect on special education students (Turnbull, 2005). As schools faced the ever-rising proficiency bar established under NCLB, special education students continued to achieve at rates significantly lower than their abled peers. Therefore, schools began to move more students with disabilities out of segregated classrooms into the regular education setting. The move to include more students with disabilities in the regular education class was intended to increase their academic proficiency rates (Cooper-Duffy, et al., 2010). However, with this move to include students simply to meet the proficiency bar necessary to maintain federal funding for educational programs, students with disabilities were marginalized and even ridiculed or teased in plain view of regular education students (Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

Special education law as established under IDEA did not align with the accountability requirements in NCLB. Therefore, Congress addressed the misalignment between the laws in the 2004 revisions to IDEA in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

IDEIA. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 is the most recent revision to federal special education law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). IDEIA embodied a continuation of the federal effort initiated under EHA to deinstitutionalize the lives of students with disabilities (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, & Wood, 2007; Trainor, 2008). IDEIA retained and clarified key provisions in IDEA including FAPE and due process. Additionally, IDEIA addressed the

achievement gap and dismal post secondary outcomes of students with disabilities. This disparity of outcomes was addressed through transitional planning and by aligning IDEA with the provisions in NCLB (Trainor, 2008).

  Alignment to NCLB. The focus of special education law under the 1990 provisions of IDEA, and subsequent revisions represented a significant shift from simply access to public education for students with disabilities to a focus on achievement in the regular education curriculum (Apling & Jones, 2008). However, provisions in IDEA did not specifically hold schools accountable for student achievement based on a standards aligned curriculum (Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, 1997). Furthermore, under IDEA, goals and objectives in the IEP were not required to address achievement based on the regular education curriculum. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 or NCLB, held schools accountable for the achievement of all students on a standards-aligned curriculum (Turnbull, 2005). The focus on accountability under NCLB created a need to align IDEA with these achievement provisions (Reder, 2007). IDEIA 2004 addressed the accountability required by NCLB through changes to the IEP (Turnbull, 2005). Under IDEIA, goals in the IEP were required to align with the academic standards in the regular education curriculum. Additionally, all students with the exception of those with the most severe disabilities were required to take high stakes state assessments. The new accountability requirements placed greater pressure on schools to provide students with disabilities access to regular education content specialists through an inclusive setting (Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

  Transitions. The 2004 revision of IDEIA placed a greater emphasis on transitional planning and services for all students facing major changes in educational services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). As mentioned earlier, many students served through special education programs failed to graduate or gain skills necessary for employment (Achilles, et al., 2007; Morgan, et al., 2008). The transition process was designed to aid students in establishing and meeting post secondary goals (Trainor, 2008). IDEIA

provided for improved post secondary outcomes by including students in the decisions that affected their services. When students reach the secondary school level, IDEIA determined students would become part of the IEP team at age 16. Additionally, high school students were to have input in the development of their IEPs (Algozzine, et al., 2007). IDEIA also determined transitional IEPs must reflect the needs and interests of the student facing postsecondary life (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). The focus under IDEIA on transitions for postsecondary students reflected the historical intent of special education law to make students with disabilities full participants in decisions that affect their lives and eventual level of societal attainment (Algozzine, et al., 2007; Trainor, 2008).

Least Restrictive Environment: From Mainstreaming to Inclusion

From its inception, federal special education law has stated students with disabilities were to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Education of all Handicapped Act, 1975). The definition and meaning of least restrictive environment, however, has been open to interpretation (Kaufman & Agard, 1989) and has shifted with trends over time, beginning with the idea of mainstreaming to the current notion of inclusion and inclusive practices (Fisher, Roach, & Frey, 2002; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005).

Mainstreaming. The push for a least restrictive or more inclusive environment was strengthened when Congress passed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA) (Kavale & Forness, 2000). EHA required students with disabilities to be "mainstreamed," or educated to the greatest extent possible with their abled peers. However, a least restrictive environment (LRE) was not well defined in the law (Kaufman, Agard, & Semmel, 1986) and the regular education classroom was often considered merely an option for students with disabilities (Zirkel, 1986). Furthermore, mainstreaming was typically provided to

students with disabilities only when their disability could be accommodated with few, if any

modifications (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

Under the LRE mandate in EHA, the "resource model" became the principal mode for

educating students with disabilities (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Special education teachers staffed

a resource room where many students with disabilities received the core curriculum. Under this

model, if students spent at least one-half of their day in regular education classes, including

courses such as art, music, and physical education, they were considered "mainstreamed"

(Kavale & Forness, 2000). According to the United States Department of Education, by 1997,

95% of students with disabilities were mainstreamed, but increased integration failed to

significantly improve student achievement for most students with disabilities (Kavale & Forness,

2000; United States Department of Education, 1997). Largely in response to lackluster student

achievement, educators and researchers began to explore alternative instructional models for

students receiving special education services (Thomkins & Deloney, 1995).

Regular Education Initiative. In 1986, Madeline Will, then Assistant Secretary for the

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, proposed the Regular Education

Initiative (REI) (Maag & Reid, 2006). Under REI, students with disabilities would be educated

alongside their regular education peers by regular education teachers (Thomkins & Deloney,

1995; Will, 1986). Will asserted pullout programs were harmful to some students with

disabilities and proposed educating mild to moderately disabled students through a unified

system rather than through the traditional parallel model (Thomkins & Deloney, 1995; Will,

1986). Ms. Will and others purported labeling children was unnecessary, and claimed regular

education teachers were capable of educating all children, including students with disabilities.

Furthermore, proponents of REI asserted educating students with disabilities in separate facilities created gross inequity and discrimination (Kaufman & Agard, 1989; Will, 1986). However, many educators and researchers at the time characterized the Regular Education Initiative as a radical, Reaganesque "trickle down" policy aimed at reducing the cost of special education at the expense of students with disabilities (Kaufman & Agard, 1989). Although REI was controversial and never fully implemented as Will envisioned, the initiative broadened the dialogue about the rights of students with disabilities to be fully included with their regular education peers (Kaufman & Agard, 1989).

Inclusion and inclusive practices. A decade after the passage of EHA, the focus for many educators, parents, and researchers shifted from simply guaranteeing access for students with disabilities to regular schools, to access to the regular curriculum and instruction in the regular classroom (Fisher, et al., 2002). According to Kozleski (2005), for many advocates this push for greater inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom was "grounded in the principles of social justice and equity" (p. 274). Citing the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. the Board of Education, many advocates argued, a segregated education is always unequal (Taylor, Biklen, Kehr, & Searle, 1987). Lipsky and Gartner (1997) agreed many special education programs created inequity when they offered a less rigorous curriculum resulting in dismal academic performance for many students with disabilities (Fisher, et al., 2002). Advocates for inclusion asserted access to the regular education curriculum and instruction would improve the academic achievement of children with disabilities (Fisher, et al., 2002).

The inclusion movement was bolstered by the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. The amendments to IDEA, 1997 were centered on the principle student success is rooted in the

25

regular curriculum, in the regular classroom (Roach, 1999). Indeed the literature asserted

inclusive education is beneficial for all students (Artiles, 2000; Artiles, Harris-Murri, &

Rostenberg, 2006; Johnson, 2004; McCarty, 2006). Gartner and Lipsky (1987) conducted a meta

analysis of 50 studies comparing achievement gains of segregated students with disabilities to

students fully included. Findings indicated on average, the integrated students scored 30

percentile points higher than did segregated students, and Baker et al. (1994) examined three

similar meta analysis studies and reported moderate academic gains for integrated students.

Finally, the literature indicated abled students benefited from innovative teaching practices

developed for the inclusive classroom and demonstrated improved attitudes toward students with

disabilities (Artiles, et al., 2006; Burnstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004).

Inclusive practices. Today, the majority of students with disabilities are educated in the

regular education setting (United States Department of Education, 2002b) and many educators

implement a variety of inclusive practices to scaffold the learning of all students (Villa, et al.,

2005). Currently, many teachers differentiate instruction through heterogeneous student

collaboration techniques, small group instruction, front loading or pre-teaching, and through a

variety of technology aides (Villa, et al., 2005). Additionally, many general education teachers

and special educators collaborate to provide instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners.

As mentioned previously, the literature indicated inclusive education promotes significant

academic and social benefits for all students, (Baker, et al., 1994; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987) yet

some groups of minority students with disabilities are still more likely to experience instruction

in segregated special classes (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Skiba, et al., 2008).

26

The Minority Experience

The literature indicated many minority students with disabilities experience schooling differently from other students. Likewise many researchers and advocates for students with disabilities implicate segregated educational programs as intentional placements that keep diverse students apart from white general education students (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). However, while Skiba, et al. (2008) agreed some minority student groups are often overrepresented and thus placed in restrictive special education programs, they purport the reasons for this minority disproportionality are varied and complex. Furthermore, they explained racial bias is not always to blame for this overrepresentation. For instance, due to cultural differences, white teachers may feel inadequately prepared to meet the needs of underachieving minority students. Educators may see placement of minority students in special education as the only way to gain the resources necessary to help them experience success. Additionally, researchers blamed language barriers as reasons for minority disproportionality. For instance, teachers may struggle to differentiate between a language disability and language acquisition for English Language Learners (ELL) (Barrera, 2006).

Regardless of the reasons, the research clearly indicates some minority groups are overrepresented in special education. Indeed the data indicate students of color are also overrepresented in restrictive or segregated special educational settings (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006). As stated earlier, segregated educational programs are inherently likely to create inequity (Taylor, 1987). Indeed, minority students with disabilities often experience inequitable access to both rigorous instruction and activities that promote social growth and societal attainment (Baker, 1995; Baker, et al., 1994).

27

Rigorous instruction. Many minority students with disabilities continue to experience schooling through a "mainstream" or segregated model where they receive much of their instruction in core subjects including math and reading from resource teachers (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Even when students with disabilities are included in the regular education class, these students often receive less rigorous instruction from a teacher's aide in the back of the room (Baker, 1995). Despite requirements in NCLB for teachers to be "highly qualified" in the subjects they teach (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001), many special education resource teachers at the secondary level are not considered highly qualified to teach the core curriculum (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004). Therefore, mainstream models often deny minority students with disabilities access to highly qualified general education instructional experts; subsequently creating a significant achievement gap (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). In turn, the achievement gap contributes to a higher drop out rate among minority students with disabilities, which leads to eventual economic disparity (Daniel et al., 2006). Furthermore, minority students with disabilities are suspended or expelled more often than their abled peers, further denying them access to critical instruction (Achilles, et al., 2007; Wakelin, 2008).

Access to social success. Access to peer models and to extra curricular activities is crucial to the social development of students with disabilities (Garfinkle & Schwartz, 2002). Wiener and Tardif (2004) agreed students with disabilities "can benefit socially and emotionally from more inclusive education placements due to the opportunities to make friends with normally achieving students" (p. 20). However, minority students with disabilities have less access to their abled peers and social activities in the school setting (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). In fact, minority children with disabilities are less likely to participate in student government, clubs,

28

athletics, and in the arts (Morgan, et al., 2008; Otis-Wilson, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005).

Regardless of repeated attempts through the courts and federal legislation to give greater access to the regular education experience for all students with disabilities, equality of educational experience does not exist, (Handler, 2007). Handler explained, "Despite societal strides toward greater inclusivity of disabled citizens in all aspects of life, the American education system continues to maintain a segregated classroom down the hall where unable or undesirable students are kept" (p. 237).

This chapter presented an overview of the literature regarding the historical struggle of students with disabilities to gain equal access to public schooling. The chapter concluded with an examination of the contemporary struggle of minority students with disabilities to gain equal access. The following chapter discusses the methodology used to conduct the research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to learn what four minority students with disabilities have to say about their educational and social experiences in a regular public school. The focus of the research was on the participants' perceptions of their opportunity to fully participate in the regular education program at the research sites. The students were asked to describe their lived experiences through their personal stories as special education students. A qualitative design facilitated a dialogue between the participants and myself, (Crotty, 1998) and a critical perspective served as the underpinning of the research. Critical social theory supported a discourse that exposed marginalization rooted in issues related to disability at the research sites (Leonardo, 2004).

Researcher Positionality

Researchers using a critical perspective are unequivocal in naming practices that create injustice and do not pretend objectivity (Sandlin, 2002). Rather, critical researchers posit subjectivity is an inherent part of all research and as such researchers must not only acknowledge their biases but should explore their subjectivity throughout the research process. A continual examination of one's biases aids in understanding how such biases influence and shape the research. A researcher's subjectivity is shaped by his or her personal demographics, environment, and life experiences (Peshkin, 1988).

I'm extremely passionate about issues of equity, access, and justice for students with disabilities and acknowledge a lack of objectivity in this research. My passion for students with disabilities stems from both personal and professional experiences throughout my life. As a

preschooler, my daycare provider was a family member with a mild cognitive impairment. My aunt functioned very well at home where she cooked, cleaned, and cared for me. I seldom noticed her disability except when we left her home. In first grade, my classroom included students with significant multiple disabilities. My recollection of these peers with disabilities is their wheelchair presence in the rear of the classroom. I have no memories of them joining any learning activities, and by the time I reached junior high, they were absent from the back of the room.

As a teacher, I remember the fear mongering of some educators when we were told students with multiple disabilities would be included in the regular education classroom. Some teachers warned we would be responsible for tracheotomy and feeding tubes; students would likely die in the classroom. However, the most significant experiences shaping my subjectivity involved my time as a middle school principal. In 2011, I left an elementary school that was fully inclusive and assumed the principalship of a middle school where most students with disabilities were segregated. Students with IEPs received their math and reading instruction from special education teachers. Science and social studies were considered too rigorous for students with disabilities so study halls were provided instead. The most poignant moment during my middle school tenure was when two minority males with disabilities approached me begging to be included in science, "because science is so cool."

I am currently a high school principal and school superintendent, and I'm involved in the development of individual education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. I take the position students with disabilities should be provided with extraordinary supports to make the regular education curriculum and experience accessible. I also acknowledge, while some special

31

education students do not experience success in the regular education setting, many students with disabilities are denied access to the regular education curriculum in order to give greater advantage to privileged groups. These biases were continually reflected upon throughout the research process through a reflexive journal (Peshkin, 1988).

In order to limit my influence on the data provided by the research participants, I selected students I knew personally, but I did not supervise nor have any participation in the development of their IEPs. I also followed appropriate protocol for interviews and observations in order to place participants at ease so they felt comfortable sharing their stories (Fielding, 2001). The following sections discuss the study design, the context of the research, the criteria for participant selection, and the data collection process.

Qualitative Design

I selected a qualitative design for this study because qualitative research is particularly useful in explaining social phenomena through the perspective of the research participants (Crotty, 1998). A qualitative design supports construction of meaning, and interpretation of the data through interactive processes between the researcher and participants (Merriam, 2009). As participants shared their lived experiences, data informing the research problem emerged through their descriptive language. Qualitative methods recognize emotion as an inextricable part of the human condition (Sayler, 2007), and "an inseparable dimension of human communication" (Jia, 2001, p. 8). Therefore, a qualitative approach uses dialogue to elicit the participant's emotional responses to the study. Qualitative research typically involves conducting research within the natural setting and seeks the insights of stakeholders to inform the research problem (Merriam, 2002).

32

For this study, I was interested in the perceptions minority students with disabilities have about their educational experiences and their opportunities to fully participate in a rural public school setting. Through multiple sources of data, including student interviews, observations at the research sites, and document reviews, the educational and social experiences of the participants emerged (Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative research in this study began with a critical social theoretical perspective. Crotty (1998) posited the goal of critical inquiry is social justice; to shine light on power relationships in order to illuminate social injustice. Using a critical perspective, I sought to shine a light on unjust practices related to the educational experiences of minority students with disabilities. The context for this study was a rural middle school and high school in a small Midwestern town.

Research Site and Participants

The following section gives a detailed description of the research site and the participant selection criteria for the study. The study participants were selected because they have experiences as minority students with disabilities. Both research sites are part of the Walnut Grove Unified School District. The names of the district, schools, and students have been changed to maintain the confidentiality of the study participants.

Research Sites

Walnut Grove Unified School District is located in Walnut Grove, a small rural farming community. Walnut Grove is largely a blue-collar town with a fairly high poverty rate. The small town once thrived with an oil refinery, a national meat packing plant, and an aircraft manufacturing plant. Each of these industries has closed, forcing many Walnut Grove residents

to commute to work in a nearby larger city. The town's tree lined streets and once well-kept neighborhoods have fallen into disrepair and drug trafficking has become a major problem for local law enforcement. Walnut Grove has a large Hispanic and Native American population, but Caucasians continue to be the majority group.

Walnut Grove Unified Schools is a district serving approximately 2900 students with over 20% being identified as receiving special education services (Department of Education, 2012). According to the Walnut Grove website (2014), the school district is comprised of six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. I conducted this study at Walnut Grove Middle School, located in the center of the city, and Walnut Grove High School, located in the northwest sector of the city.

According to K-12 building reports presented on the Department of Education (2012) web page, Walnut Grove Middle School had an enrollment of 635 students during the 2011-2012 school year. Sixty-three percent of the student population was White; 4% African American, 20% Hispanic and 13% identified as other ethnicities. Approximately 69% of students qualified for a free or reduced meal rate, and 20% qualified for special education services. Walnut Grove Middle School has historically served special education students in a resource setting. During the time of the study, the majority of students with disabilities were segregated from the regular school population for the majority of their day. Each grade level had a special education math teacher and a special education reading teacher. Students with disabilities spent two class periods in each of the special education rooms. They were also assigned to a study hall for at least one class period per day in lieu of science and/or social studies. During my time as principal of Walnut Grove Middle School, teachers routinely asked for Hispanic students to be

removed from their classrooms because they could not speak or understand English. It was typical to see a group of Hispanic students in the library with a para-educator.

Walnut Grove High School had an enrollment of 782 during the 2011-2012 school year. Fifty-eight percent of the student population was White; 3% African American, 21% Hispanic and 14% identified as other ethnicities. Approximately 63% of the students qualified for a free or reduced meal rate (Department of Education, 2012). Walnut Grove High School also used a resource model as the primary delivery model for students with disabilities. However, special education students were not warehoused in study halls but allowed to take a full-range of courses, including all content classes and elective courses. Even though students with disabilities at Walnut Grove High School had greater access to the regular education setting than did students attending the middle school, a majority of students in special education dropped out prior to graduation.

Participants

Participants for this study were chosen using purposeful sampling. Creswell (2007) posited purposeful sampling indicates "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem" (p. 125). The participants for this study were four minority students with disabilities who were receiving special education services. The smaller number of participants in this study allowed me to delve deeper into the experiences of the participants and therefore gain a greater understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007). The specific minority groups were selected based on data indicating their significant rates of over identification for special education services (Kozleski &

Smith, 2005; United States Department of Education, 2002a). Specific participant selection criteria included:

1. African American, Native American, and Hispanic students receiving special education services via an IEP at one of the research sites.

2. Minority students ages 12-19 labeled as learning disabled (LD), behavior disordered (BD), emotionally disturbed (ED), or other health impaired (OHI) who are classified as mildly or moderately disabled.

For this study, I identified four students I previously supervised as a school principal and met these criteria. I maintained a professional relationship with these students and their parents in the Walnut Grove District. My ongoing relationship with the participants placed the students at ease and thus improved the quality of the data. Even though I had a strong rapport with each of the participants, I acknowledge my status as an adult, white, abled male likely influenced my understanding of their lived experiences (Peshkin, 1988). Cultural factors that shaped the students' worldviews were also foreign to my experiences and likely shaded my interpretation of the data. I further acknowledge as an abled person, I could not fully understand the lived experience of disability. Likewise, to simply speak "in place" of the participants would serve only to further marginalize them (Fielding, 2001). To this extent I sought to include the participants as co-researchers whose views of their lived educational experiences must be privileged above any account I might offer through observation or interpretation of the data (Peshkin, 1988).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection strategies implemented for this study included semi-structured interviews, observations at the research sites, and a review of relevant documents. Parental consent was gained for all minor participants, and student participants were asked to give their assent before participating in the study. (See Appendix A for consent and assent forms.)

Semi-structured Interviews

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of the four students identified with mild to moderate disabilities and placed on Individual Education Plans (IEP). Participant interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded in order to identify themes and findings from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Open-ended questions were used in the semi-structured interviews to guide conversations between the students and myself. The guided approach to interviewing was based on appropriate protocol, allowing flexibility in question order and "the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviewing was conducted as a planned conversation so students could tell their stories in their own voices (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Interviews were conducted in the office suites or library in the research sites and a school staff member was asked to remain in the vicinity, but not close enough to overhear the conversation, for the duration of the interviews. I digitally recorded each interview and documented any concerns that arose (Patton, 2002). Interview questions are contained in Appendix B.

Observations

Observations of participants at the research sites provided me with a firsthand account of the students' opportunities to fully participate in their educational setting (Merriam, 2009).

Observations of participants in the research setting provided dependable data to supplement the interviews without my direct interaction with participants. Observational data corroborated data collected during the interviews. Merriam (2009) asserted observations are a reliable data source when she stated,

> Observations take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview. (p. 117)

I observed the interactions participants had with their peers before and after school. I observed students in the commons areas of each school, in the hallways, and during a sporting event. I was not allowed to conduct my research once the academic day began. However, a licensed special education teacher, "Jan," assisted me by conducting observations of the participants during one class period. She observed the participants in the special education setting or resource room. Jan did not participate in any classroom activities, nor did she interact with students during the observations. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, Jan took notes based on the interactions the participants had with their peers and service providers during the academic hour. She noted the activities students were involved in and recorded the roles para-educators and the licensed special education teachers played during the observation. Jan and I conducted two observations per participant. The study participants were aware she and I were conducting observations, and our presence likely had some influence on the students' behavior (Merriam, 2009).

Observation protocol recommended by existing literature was followed while observing

the participants in their regular school context (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Observations

took place in the natural setting, which included the research sites. Permission to visit

classrooms for observations was gained from appropriate personnel. Jan and I took a non-

participant role in student activities and had minimal contact with the participants. Extensive

field notes were recorded during the observations (Merriam, 2009).

Field notes were recorded throughout the observational process. Field notes provided me

with a written version of the experiences I saw and heard within the study context (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2007). Jan and I recorded observations of participant interactions in the cafeteria,

hallways, and in the classroom. The field notes provided an additional account of the

participants' lived experiences as minority students with disabilities. Field notes served as valid

information that either validated or contradicted the interview data (Merriam, 2009).

Document Review

A review of documents related to the research provided additional data for this study

(Ritchie & Lewis, 2009). Documents for review included the participants' Individual Education

Plans obtained from the participants' parents. Information in the IEP's included the participants'

primary exceptionalities, their IQ and academic testing scores, their intended services, and their

goals. The data from the review of documents were compared to the data gathered through

interviews and observations. Ritchie and Lewis (2009) explain documentary analysis is

particularly useful when historical events are relevant to the research. The review of IEP

documents revealed some inconsistent or contradictory information. For instance, the male

participants' IEPs stated their primary exceptionality was a learning disability (LD), yet they received services for behavior disorders.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis includes organizing information obtained from the data sources so the researcher can draw meaning from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this study, emerging data from participant interviews were studied using the constant comparative process (Merriam, 1998). Data from audio recordings were transcribed, and I read the transcriptions and made note of any instances from one interview and linked it to similar incidences occurring in subsequent interviews (Merriam, 2009). Continual and comparative analysis of the participants' comments brought themes to light, and as themes emerged, the data were coded and arranged in a searchable database (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, data from observations and document reviews were analyzed and compared to the data from the transcripts. Finally, the data were shared with the research participants to ensure their experiences as minority students with disabilities were properly depicted.

Research Quality

Techniques to ensure the dependability or consistency of the research, including triangulation and member checking, were used, and steps were taken to ensure the findings were based in the data and consistent with the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation is the process of comparing data collected using a variety of techniques (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation lends dependability to research when data from multiple sources display common themes (Creswell, 2007). For this study, I compared data across interviews and interview data with data collected during observations. Triangulation for this study provided a

richer understanding of the educational experiences of minority students with disabilities. Through the data comparison, the IEP documents did not always triangulate with the interviews and observations. For instance, the participants' provided special education services did not necessarily match the primary exceptionality as indicated in the IEP. Additionally, some participants' IEPs provided for full inclusion in content classes, yet they were removed from the regular education classroom on a regular basis.

Member checking was used with the interview participants. Member checking involves sharing the collected data with the research participants thus ensuring the participant voices are fairly portrayed and not misrepresented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted member checking is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Each participant was provided with a copy of the transcript from his or her interview. Participants were allowed to read the transcript to ensure I accurately portrayed their experiences. I also asked clarifying questions regarding some of the interview data during the member checking.

In order to establish a greater understanding of the problem and ensure the dependability of the data, the participants and the setting were described in detail. Rich details allow the readers to place themselves in the setting and in the shoes of the research participants. Such detail creates a scaffold for readers as they attempt to understand the educational experiences of minority students with disabilities (Denzin, 2001).

The following chapter discloses the findings from the interviews conducted with the study participants. The students were encouraged to share their educational experiences as students with disabilities. The students' stories gave insight into their daily lives. Each student

shared his or her dreams and hopes for a bright future. Furthermore, the participants believed a

direct link exists between their educational opportunities and their future societal attainment.

Chapter 4

Findings: The Students' Educational Experiences

The four participants in this study were two Native American males, one Hispanic female, and one bi-racial female of African American and Hispanic descent. At the time of this study in 2013, two participants were attending middle school and two were attending high school. All participants were identified as minority students with learning disabilities receiving special education services via individual education plans (IEPs). Although their primary diagnosis was learning disabilities, the male participants received special education services for behavior disorders in a program segregated from abled students. The two female participants were in partial inclusion programs with services provided both in the special education room and in regular education classes. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of each study participant and all other persons mentioned in the data.

Prior to conducting each interview, I explained this study was designed to give a voice to students with disabilities. Students understood my goal was not only to give them a voice, but through their stories, I hoped to improve the educational services provided to all students with disabilities. The participants were open about their experiences, and as the interview process progressed, they became very reflective about their educational opportunities. Interviews and observations were conducted during the spring and summer of 2013.

Billy

In the spring of 2013, Billy was 18-years old and a recent high school graduate. Billy is a handsome Native American male. He is approximately 6'2" and 225 pounds of solid muscle. Billy is clean-shaven with a short, neat haircut, and he typically dresses in a clean graphic tee

shirt and jeans. Billy seems bright, articulate, and affable. He knows how to give a firm handshake and easily flashes a disarming smile. Billy reported he would like to be a welder and was especially proud of his recent graduation from high school in May 2013. Billy received the same standard diploma as his abled peers.

Billy is the only athlete among the study participants. His muscular frame suggests a football player and although Billy tried football during middle school, he eventually settled on baseball. Billy played baseball with his regular education peers during all four years of high school. He seemed most happy when discussing baseball and enthused, "I loved it!" I attended one of Billy's games where he hit a homerun. As Billy rounded third base and headed for home plate, his team, in typical baseball tradition, cleared the dugout to celebrate with him. During that moment of jubilation Billy appeared completely accepted by the team. Billy's love for baseball extended to his coach as well. When speaking of head baseball coach Brown, Billy explained,

> He was great. Mr. Brown was funny as heck. At first I thought the assistant coach was a little douche, but he turned out to be all right. He's not as laid back as Mr. Brown but he is still cool and he doesn't get mad. Those guys are pretty cool.

When speaking of his baseball teammates Billy described his comfort outside the special education setting when he stated, "I get along with all kinds of kids now. I can hang out with any group. I fit in wherever I go." Baseball was the one link Billy reported to the regular education setting. Indeed Billy did not have difficulties related to his disability during baseball.

Billy's Family

Billy lives with both biological parents and his older sister in a small ramshackle two bedroom home because the family has limited financial resources. Billy's dad is a long-haul truck driver and his mother is a clerk for a large discount retailer. Billy clearly loves his family and explained he found it necessary at times to defend the family honor because "people talked crap on my mom and sister."

Billy made multiple references throughout the interview to bullying he experienced at school related to "talking trash" on his family. Billy partially blamed these incidences of bullying in the regular education setting for his eventual placement in special education. However, as the interview progressed and Billy reflected over his school career, he determined it was his fault he was placed in special education because he chose not to control his anger when people "dissed" his family. Billy would later reveal his parents were not very involved in his education. In fact, Billy reported no one advocated for him during middle school when he first began to exhibit behavioral difficulties.

School Experiences

Billy was eager to talk about his school experiences and the journey leading to his placement in special education. In his initial interview, Billy talked non-stop for almost 45 minutes with little prompting. Prior to the interview, I explained my interest in his school experiences as a student receiving special education services. I did not notice any manifestation of a disability during the interview. His verbal and social skills were excellent, and I found him to be very astute.

Billy had not reflected on some of the issues addressed in the interview prior to this study. As the interview progressed, Billy grappled with his experiences of marginalization as a student with disabilities. For instance, he struggled with the realization his teachers and his special education program had not adequately prepared him for the future. Indeed, Billy expressed his abled peers were ahead of him academically.

Billy described his school experiences around two central themes: experiences leading to his placement in the behavior disorder (BD) program, and experiences during his special education placement. Billy described his special education experiences with the "system," and experiences with the adult service providers. Billy reported experiences leading up to his placement in special education as considerably negative and he initially blamed the system for his removal from the regular education program. Prior to placement in special education, Billy frequently engaged in fights with his school peers.

Fighting. Billy talked extensively about fighting, which he related to his disability. He reported fighting with his mom at times as a normal teenage occurrence when he stated, "Me and mom get in fights all the time. That's mom and son and we always do but when we get in a fight, I say screw it and I just leave. Then the next morning it's like nothing ever happened." However, it was different when Billy's peers disrespected his family.

Billy reported multiple fights during his 7th grade year in the months leading up to his placement in special education. He lamented, "I got in a fight with Johnny during middle school. The reason we got in a fight was because he was talking crap on my mom and sister." Billy explained he endured significant and repeated bullying in middle school from peers. Billy felt

46

the bullying precipitated his frequent temper outbursts, which in turn triggered fights with peers. Billy reflected,

> When I would walk down the hall they would bump into me and call me pussy and a lot of little names like that. Just average picking on me constantly, and I don't like fighting but you can only push someone for so long and then they'll let you have it. It was like three or four kids that were in a group and they targeted me; in a way like bullying but not in a way because I stuck up for myself.

Billy explained he did not report the bullying because of a strained relationship with the school principal.

Billy partially blamed the repeated bullying incidents in middle school as the reason he ended up in the BD program during 7th grade. He shared, "When I first went there I had so much anger; so much rage." When I asked Billy to describe his experiences of bullying, he explained a group of boys framed him at a school dance. According to Billy, someone vandalized the restroom during the dance and then blamed him for the damage. Billy was adamant during the interview he did not cause the damage. According to him,

> The principal called me in and he said, "Hey I've got five other people that said you destroyed the bathroom. You vandalized school property." I was like, "Man I didn't destroy anything. I didn't touch it." He [principal] just kept saying I was destroying the school property and he was going to get me for vandalism or something like that.

> Billy clearly felt the principal was intentionally pushing him to explode when he explained, "He was pushing my buttons," by repeating over and over Billy destroyed the restroom. He further explained he became so frustrated during the interrogation by the

administrator, "I picked up the chair and threw it against the wall and said I'm leaving."

According to Billy, three days later, his mom came in for an IEP meeting and subsequently he

was placed in the BD program. Billy indicated he was relieved to enter the program and told the

IEP team, "You know, you can just send me there for a full day because I don't need to be here

with this guy," referencing the principal. Billy was convinced he could not be successful in the

regular education program because of persistent bullying not only from his peers, but the

school's administrator.

Billy eventually admitted initiating most of the fights with peers during middle school.

Billy accepted responsibility for his misbehavior when he said, "I'd have to say in all reality, it's

my fault. Mine for getting myself put in the BD program. I had anger problems like crazy."

Billy blamed himself throughout the interview for his placement in special education. Once

Billy transitioned to the BD program, his conflicts were primarily with his teachers.

Experiences in the BD Program

Billy stated he was identified for special education services in 7th grade, and he remained

in special education through high school graduation. At the time of the interview in fall 2013

Billy attended a segregated behavior disorder program provided on the Walnut Grove High

School campus. Billy described his educational experiences as a student with disabilities

situated around the "system" and the teachers. Billy typically viewed the system very negatively

while initially portraying his teachers very positively. As Billy retold his educational

experiences, he attempted at times to extricate the teachers from the "system" because he did not

want to blame them for the injustice he suffered.

The teachers. Billy described developing strong relationships with his special education teachers. At the very beginning of the interview, Billy praised the adults in his program when he stated, "I think the teachers there are awesome. All you have to do is ask them for help and they are right there to help you. I really don't have anything bad to say about them." However, as the interview progressed, Billy reflected on his experiences and noted some adult behavior as questionable. Billy had not considered prior to the interview the adults in his special education program had mistreated him. He even viewed his mistreatment as a normal part of his behavior plan. Billy struggled with the realization the adults were part of a broken system that disadvantaged him.

Billy designated only one teacher by name, Miss Suzy. Miss Suzy was his high school teacher, and he gushed about her when he stated, "I'd have to say Miss Suzy was absolutely one of my favorite teachers. I looked to her like she was my second mom" even though "me and her went round and round sometimes." Billy truly believed teaching was not just a job for Miss Suzy because she would "pay him" to do jobs for her after school, such as helping her move to a different house. Billy even recalled helping Miss Suzy when her mom passed away by packing the decedent's belongings. Billy felt Miss Suzy had unique skills because, "Miss Suzy was always notorious about helping me get my anger under control." Later Billy would describe Miss Suzy in a less flattering light as he described questionable treatment by her.

Billy described some dubious teacher practices, but interpreted them as fitting when he shared, "If it wasn't for those teachers pushing and pushing my buttons, I don't think I'd be what I am now." Billy inferred teachers intentionally taunted him when he stated, "Sitting there knowing what pushes my buttons and me having to control that really helped me." Billy saw the

49

button pushing as an appropriate strategy teachers employed to help him control his behavior.

Billy described the "button pushing" as including violating his personal space, yelling at him, and grabbing things from his hands as a normal occurrence.

When I asked Billy to explain specifically what teachers did to push his buttons, he began to describe a less rosy view of Miss Suzy as he shared, "Uh Miss Suzy has I think from my experiences, she suffers from bi-polar. She doesn't have a real hard time controlling her temper but she gets real snappy. Her voice is a little aggravating."

As Billy continued to reflect on how his teachers "pushed his buttons" he recalled an incident when Miss Suzy demanded he give up his hoodie. Billy was determined no one would take his prized baseball hoodie. A tug-of-war ensued between Miss Suzy and Billy over the garment, as he explained,

> They also sometimes jerk things out of our hands. They might not want us having that
> item. And once Miss Suzy came in there and tried to take my hoodie away from me and I
> wrapped it around my hand and kept a tight fist where she couldn't take my hoodie away
> and it's either I give her my hoodie [or] if I keep that thing they are trying to take away
> from me they'll call the police.

Billy decided to give the hoodie to Miss Suzy because the price for disobedience was far too expensive. Failure to comply at times resulted in a visit from the police.

In fact, Billy explained the police were called "many times" during his almost six years in the BD program and law enforcement escorted him away on two occasions because he had "terrible anger." Billy would go into rages where he would throw things and shout expletives at the staff. Some of these incidences of rage were related to the button pushing. Teachers would

50

make demands and remain in Billy's space until he either complied or exploded. Billy admitted he eventually learned to capitulate to his teachers when they asked him to turn over a personal item "because I wanted to graduate." After all, his teachers were "just trying to help him" control his anger.

Billy became increasingly compliant over the years because it was futile to resist the staff. If he didn't comply the police would be called and he might be arrested. He reiterated, "I learned these steps to control my anger to help me out for the rest of my life and keep me out of jail." Billy rationalized the questionable treatment he received from the staff was for his own good. Billy, a strong hulk of a young man, felt powerless against the adults in his program. If he wanted to graduate, he would have to comply with his teachers' demands. After all, the adults in his view wanted him to graduate as well.

While Billy indicated the adults in his program were solely responsible for his successful completion of schooling, he also felt the system failed him. Blaming the system and not the teachers was one way Billy rationalized receiving less access to rigorous instruction and instructional experts as being appropriate. He realized his abled peers were more prepared for the post high school graduation world. Billy explained, "I won't be as prepared and it will be challenging because I traded help with my behavior for academics." In Billy's view, the BD placement meant sacrificing rigorous academics, which was a function of the broken system.

The system. Billy saw the system as all the rules and regulations that controlled his educational experiences. He also believed the "button pushing" by teachers was required by the system. Billy stated the system is "a little messed up," and "the BD program needs to rethink their program because it's just too juvenile."

Billy explained the BD program treated almost grown students as children. For example, he stated, "The way they treat us like we are 4 or 5 years old and we are really 18, 19, or 20 because we got people that can go there until they are 21." The program used a sticker chart reward system, which consisted of students earning stickers each day for good behavior. If the student earned a set amount of stickers, he or she received a reward each Friday afternoon such as a movie or a field trip. Billy did not like the sticker chart reward system, which he described as "just childish."

Students in the BD program had limited freedom and were under tight control, as Billy complained, "You have to get permission to get a drink even when you are walking by the water fountain or permission to use the restroom." Billy also described a lack of freedom in an environment so completely structured he felt like a prisoner when he stated, "They kinda keep you under lock and key."

Billy complained he was frisked each morning when he arrived at school. Although Billy hated the daily pat down, he relented it was for everyone's safety. Billy also complained during school hours he was not allowed to keep his billfold or other personal items such as his phone, hat, or even his driver's license. Billy was suspicious when the staff would take his billfold thus gaining access to his social security card and other personal information. Billy did, however, reiterate throughout the interview a belief he was ultimately to blame for his placement in the prison-like environment. He explained, "I'd have to say in all reality, it's my fault. Mine for getting myself put in the BD program and mine for wanting to stay there."

Because Billy accepted responsibility for his predicament many times throughout the interview, I wondered if his teachers had programmed him to believe his situation was indeed his

fault and not the fault of an inept system. For instance, Billy never expected to achieve

academically because, in his estimation, the system was not designed to help with both behavior

and academics.

Academics. As the discussion shifted to academics, Billy described his instructional

program as considerably less rigorous than the behavior support program. In fact, as Billy

explained, he could not have academic rigor in the BD program when he acknowledged, "I

traded academics for help with my behavior." Billy again accepted the blame, saying, "I could

have gone to regular school and got the academics that would have helped me be successful. I'd

be a lot more educated if I had attended regular school. I think it is a weighting system. It

balanced out." In Billy's estimation, it was fair. He received the critical support to help him

manage his behavior "to avoid jail" and support was what he traded for academic rigor.

Billy believed he did not deserve to have help with both his anger and academics, and he

described a system with inadequate resources to meet his needs. Billy reported, "All the people

in my program are trained to help with anger issues in that field of expertise. But we only had

two teachers in that program." Billy believed his teachers were trained in assisting students with

behavioral difficulties, not academics. According to Billy, the system failed to provide adequate

resources, but the teachers were not to be blamed. In fact, he again blamed himself as he

explained, "I thought about going back but I chose to stay." Billy indicated he had been offered

the opportunity to try a partial day in the regular school but he declined even though he reported

overcoming his anger issues.   Billy stated,

My last two years, well my last year there I only got ISS [In School Suspension] once and

no OSS [Out of School Suspension]. The year before my junior year I got OSS once and

ISS twice. That's normal. I'm sure kids in the regular school get ISS and OSS.

Because Billy did not have daily access to his abled peers, he saw disciplinary suspension as a

normal part of school life for students with disabilities and abled students. Billy's reluctance to

return to regular education stemmed from his memories of the bullying he experienced. He did

not want to face some of the same students who taunted him during 7th grade.

Billy explained he mostly studied independently and some of his work was done online.

Billy indicated, **"**I worked online for math. And I totally disliked that. It was very boring. With

a book at least you could look back, but not with the online piece. You gotta close this tab out

and open this Internet piece." I asked if he had help with math, and he indicated a para would

help him occasionally but "there were so many kids and only one [para] to help all of us." Billy

explained he never had access to a real math teacher. Indeed, Billy did not have access to any

content specialist.

Billy didn't seem to feel his lack of access to instructional experts was unfair. In Billy's

words, "It was fair" even though he expressed, "I won't be as prepared and it will be

challenging" in a postsecondary program. Billy's IEP indicated he did indeed suffer

academically due to his lack of access to instructional experts. Billy graduated with little more

than a middle school level skill set as indicated by his last academic test battery.

Billy's Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Billy attended his final IEP meeting before graduating without his parents. Because Billy

was 18, his parents were not required to attend the meeting or sign any of the documents. I

asked Billy if he had any input in the development of the final IEP. Billy explained everything was ready when he arrived for the meeting and he just signed the document. Billy reported the meeting was "very short."

I conducted a review of Billy's Individual Education Plan (IEP) from his senior year in high school. Billy's IEP listed his exceptionality as learning disabled (LD) although he received his services in the behavior disorder program. While the IEP mentioned Billy sometimes struggled with behavior, the IEP never indicated a behavior disorder or major problems with behavior. While the IEP did list one behavior goal, there was no mention of a conduct disorder, ADHD, mood disorder, or other diagnosis indicative of a behavior disorder. The IEP did not indicate Billy was on any medication for behavioral issues.

Billy's cognitive ability, based on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children 3rd Edition (2003), placed him in the low average range of functioning. His verbal and nonverbal skills were also listed as low average, and academic testing indicated he functions at the 6th grade level.

Billy's IEP listed four goals. Three of the goals were based on improving academic skills in language arts. His fourth goal stated, "Billy will respond to staff in an appropriate tone and manner when given a directive or asked a question 80% of the time."

The IEP provided for 20 minutes of counseling weekly as the only special service provided to Billy. However, the IEP did list two accommodations to his instruction including a separate and quiet study location and frequent breaks. Billy agreed the staff counselor included him in a group session each week, and paras would help him with his work if he requested it. The only time Billy was in a separate and quiet location was during ISS.

55

Post-Secondary Life

Billy's special education services, just as he predicted, did not prepare him for post secondary life. As of August 2013, Billy had not obtained gainful employment nor was he enrolled in a technical school. Billy did attempt unsuccessfully to obtain a job in the fast food industry after graduation. Instead, Billy mowed lawns and did other odd jobs to earn money. Billy did not enroll in a post secondary program in the fall of 2013 because his parents refused to provide income tax information for the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Billy planned to move out of his parents' home as soon as he saved enough money.

Summary

Billy was well aware his placement in the BD program put him at a great disadvantage in the post secondary world. He saw his future as compromised because he did not have adequate academic skills. He clearly believed the BD program was there almost exclusively to help him control his anger. Billy saw his placement in special education as a tradeoff or a way to stay out of jail, not a means to gain academic skills and societal attainment. Although Billy spoke negatively about the "system" that controlled his educational experiences, ultimately, he blamed himself for his situation. He felt he got what he deserved because of his disability.

The adult service providers in Billy's behavior disorder program used questionable behavior control strategies. Teachers and para-educators did not respect Billy's personal space and at times grabbed personal items from his hands. If Billy refused to turn over personal items, the police were called to force compliance. Billy's high school teacher saw Billy as cheap labor as he helped her with personal household chores outside the school day.

Billy did not have access to instructional content specialists, and much of his instructional support was provided by non-licensed para-professionals. Billy completed most of his studies independently because of his limited access to teachers and para-educators. Billy did not have the opportunity to have rich academic discussions with peers because he worked independently and was segregated from his abled peers.

Billy was completely segregated from his regular education peers with the exception of his time playing baseball. When Billy participated in baseball, he did not exhibit behavioral problems. Even though Billy was successful in baseball he believed he could not be successful in the regular education setting because the work was too difficult and he was academically too far behind his abled peers.

Billy was unprepared for post secondary life. He was unable to obtain gainful employment, and his parents did not support his efforts to enroll in a technical school. Billy faces an uphill battle to gain an education that will allow him to enter the middle class.

Rosa

At the time of her interview in the spring of 2013, Rosa was a 16 year-old high school junior. Rosa is bilingual and Spanish is her first language. Rosa demonstrated good conversational English so communication during the interview was not problematic. Rosa did struggle with academic vocabulary as indicated in her IEP. She is a beautiful young lady with piercing dark eyes and curly brown hair. She is tall; towering over most of her peers, and is slightly overweight. Rosa is vivacious, at times quite loud, and wise beyond her years. She does not hesitate to express her opinion and occasionally used expletives during the interview to emphasize her point of view. Out of respect to me, Rosa always gave a preemptive warning

before swearing. She often wagged a lecturing finger through the air when responding to my

questions, with the other hand planted firmly on her hip. At the time of this study, Rosa was

living with a foster family. Her foster home was a far cry from where Rosa lived for eight years.

Rosa and her family moved to a poor neighborhood in a large Midwestern city when she was 8

years old.

Life Growing Up In The Ghetto

Rosa was very hesitant to talk about her home life, but briefly discussed her family and

what she described as life in the ghetto. Rosa's father is African American, and her mother is

Hispanic. Rosa's mother speaks only Spanish and worked as a maid in an inner city motel.

Rosa's dad worked a variety of odd jobs when he was not incarcerated. Even when her dad was

not in jail, he was seldom in the home. Rosa has one older brother who eventually landed in a

children's home after being placed in 18 foster homes. Rosa also had one younger adolescent

sister, and a brother Raul who was four years old in the spring of 2013. Rosa was particularly

close to Raul and reported she was his primary caregiver while she lived in the home of her birth

parents.

Rosa grew up in a high poverty, crime-ridden neighborhood in a large city. Her house

was barely habitable, and the family often went without utilities and basic needs. Rosa reported

her family, "lived in the ghetto [of] ghettos." The ghetto was so rough, Rosa had to "stick up"

for her siblings and protect them from the neighborhood drug dealers.

Rosa reported she was the de facto mother figure in her home and explained she often

stayed home from school to care for Raul because, "my mom and dad couldn't take care of us."

Rosa even reported taking her brother to the doctor because,

When he was born he was sick, and I went with him to the doctor and watched what they

do. We would go to a pediatrician. I would ask the pediatrician what they do. They said

they take care of babies so I decided that's what I want to do.

It was during Raul's doctor visits when Rosa decided she wanted to become a doctor when she

grew up. Rosa was very attached to Raul and remained the primary caregiver to her younger

siblings until they were all placed in foster care in 2011.

When I asked why she and her siblings were placed in foster care, Rosa seemed reluctant

to discuss the situation. Based on her expressions, it was obvious this was a painful subject for

her. Rosa's description of events leading up to her eventual foster care placement painted a very

dark time in her life. She reported, "We were taken into foster care because we were missing so

much school. I would get into fights, and I would stay home to take care of Raul." Rosa

reported Social Rehabilitative Services (SRS) suspected sexual abuse as she explained, "They

thought I got raped even though I was just walking around [City]. They did a rape kit on me but

they found nothing." Social services suspected a family member was sexually abusing Rosa, but

she denied this abuse. Even though Rosa and her siblings were neglected, she did not want to be

removed from the home because she loved her mom. However, her role as "mom" to Raul

hastened her removal from the home due to her school truancy.

Likewise, Rosa's truancy almost landed her in lock up. The judge threatened to place

Rosa in jail. However, the judge decided to send Rosa to an alternative weekend program

designed to help troubled youth get back on track through counseling and educational services.

Rosa explained,

When I went to court the judge was going to send me to juvy [juvenile detention] for 14

days but instead of that he sent me to the weekend alternative program. After I got done

with that we had a new worker, Sue, and she started having suspicions. And just pretty

much they said [my home] was not stable and so they came and took us away on April

Fool's Day.

 Rosa's parents were not providing for the family's basic needs nor were the children attending

school on a regular basis. Coupled with the neglect, social services suspected Rosa was a victim

of sexual abuse; therefore, she and her siblings were removed from the home. Rosa reported her

mom and dad had their parental rights severed in 2012.

A New Life in Walnut Grove

The focus of the interview turned away from Rosa's painful past to her new life in

Walnut Grove. After Rosa and her siblings were removed from their home in 2011, she and her

sister were placed in a foster home in Walnut Grove. Rosa was familiar with Walnut Grove

because she attended school there during first and second grades. Rosa's new foster parents

were Caucasian. They fostered five children, including Rosa and her sister. Rosa's foster mom

worked in the home, and her foster father was an engineer for a manufacturing company. The

family lived in a neat two-story home in a middle class neighborhood; a far cry from the "ghetto

of ghettos" where Rosa spent the previous eight years of her life. Sadly, Rosa's brother Raul

was placed in a separate foster home, but she was allowed to visit him two times per month.

Rosa's older brother remained in a children's home. Rosa's new home has provided stability for

her and her sister.

Rosa was happy in her new home as she illustrated, "I like it here. I'm getting the help I need here. I didn't have that help before. I've improved my grades a lot." For Rosa, the stability offered through her new home helped her perform better in school.

Rosa was amazingly resilient considering the abuse and neglect she suffered, and a new family offered her a second chance in Walnut Grove. Rosa was happy in her new high school and she stated, "I like my friends, my awesome principal; my counselor." Rosa attended Walnut Grove High School from 2011 to 2013. During the summer of 2013, Rosa and her new family moved to a large metropolitan area in another state.

Experiences at Walnut Grove High School

During the interview and observations, Rosa appeared very confident and happy in the school setting and had a following of friends. I observed Rosa before school on one occasion. During the observation, a group of three girls immediately rushed Rosa as she entered the school commons. The girls appeared excited to see Rosa, and they quickly entered into an animated conversation, speaking as much with their hands as with words. Each girl gave Rosa a quick hug, and when the bell rang, the group walked en masse to the locker bay. Along the way Rosa walked down the middle of the hall as if she owned the place, speaking to several students on her way to class.

As I observed Rosa and her friends, I thought she seemed like a queen, head held high, waving to her subjects with her three ladies in waiting following closely behind. When I asked her about peer relationships she seemed modest about her following as she reported, "With my friends I do okay; except the boys. They act like retards and say a bunch of stupid stuff to make other people laugh but sometimes uh, I haven't punched anyone yet. But I want to." Rosa had

61

clashes with a few students in her new school and at times considered punching peers. Rosa

shared some students did not like her. She explained her conflicts with peers, mentioning Kelly,

a student who pushes her to the edge, by name.

> People think I'm very hateful but I'm not. It's like with Kelly. She has this problem of
>
> giving me a dirty look and it gets to the point where I say, "Do you want me to punch
>
> your eyes out?" She just gets to my boiling edge and I'm going to punch her one of these
>
> days. But I don't want to do that because I'm better than that.

Rosa used the phrase "punching their eyes out" several times during the interview when

referencing conflicts with peers. As I reflected on my observation and the interview, I inferred

Rosa used intimidation as a learned survival skill in the ghetto. Rosa would use some of these

survival skills to ensure abled peers did not tease her because of her placement in special

education.

Experiences in Special Education

As the interview progressed, I asked Rosa what it meant to be in special education. Rosa

responded,

> Well some people think that being in SPED is being mentally retarded but it doesn't.
>
> You just have a little trouble with reading or writing. The reason why they put you in
>
> there is to help you do better and when you start doing better they'll put you into an
>
> actual real class with a bunch of kids.

I asked Rosa to explain what she meant by an "actual real class" and she clarified a real class is

the regular math and English classes for abled students. Furthermore, Rosa explained when

students are allowed to attend "real classes" they are not separated from their friends, saying

wistfully, "I would like to be with my friends."

Rosa reported receiving English, algebra, and resource help in the special education

room, and she participated in science and social studies in the regular education setting with para

support. I asked Rosa if she had the same learning opportunities as students in regular math and

English and she stated, "No." Rosa felt her special education classes were not as rigorous and

compared her special education classes to "real classes" when she reported,

> It's easier because you don't really get that much homework in SPED classes. Like with
>
> math you do the work in class and you don't have the homework. It's the same with
>
> English; you don't really have homework so it's easier.

Because Rosa received special education services, her experiences were significantly different

from her abled peers. For example, Rosa's coursework was less rigorous than the "real" classes

and she had less access to content specialists. I asked Rosa who taught her math class, and she

replied, "Ms. Rita," who was a non-licensed para-educator. When I asked why the special

education teacher did not teach math, Rosa shrugged her shoulder as if to say she had never

considered the reason.

Rosa did not have access to a math content specialist because her IEP dictated she would

receive math in the special education room. Her math instruction delivered by a para-educator

was not rigorous. However, while observing another study participant in a regular math class,

students were noted to be sitting in groups discussing solutions to math problems and working on

iPads. During the class period, the highly qualified regular education math teacher circulated

asking students to explain their thinking, and a para-educator supported some students. Rosa needed this same level of rigorous instruction to meet her goal of becoming a pediatrician.

I reminded Rosa of her desire to become a pediatrician. I asked if she believed the special education math would prepare her for college math. Rosa responded, "I think the regular math would prepare me better to be a pediatrician. The regular math teacher is really smart. I'd rather be in her regular math class with some support." To Rosa, the regular math teacher was "smarter" than the para who taught Rosa's math class. Rosa explained, "One of my basic fears is the regular math class is ahead of us and I won't know what they are doing and I won't understand it." Rosa was aware she was falling behind her abled peers and this placed her at a disadvantage as she prepared for college.

During an observation of Rosa in the special education resource room, indeed the para taught the math class while the special education teacher sat at her desk. The students sat passively in rows and columns while the para taught the lesson. The students did not talk during the instruction, and after the lesson concluded, students began working problems on their own. The licensed special education teacher remained at her desk and the para-instructor exited the room. Students did not ask the licensed teacher for help with their assignments. Rosa worked for about five minutes and then opened her laptop. At this point the licensed teacher walked over to Rosa and stated, "You can't just be surfing the net" to which Rosa replied angrily, "I'm not. I'm doing an assignment for Mr. White," her social studies teacher. Rosa reported humiliation from the special education teacher was a regular occurrence. All the study participants mentioned instances of humiliation or embarrassment related to their disability.

Disability and humiliation. As we continued to discuss Rosa's placement in special education, she expressed she did not like her special education teacher, Ms. Smith. Rosa complained, "She's always on my case. She tells me what to do and she never leaves me alone." Rosa did not want to be in Ms. Smith's classes because she felt mistreated. For example, she described an incident where she scored a failing grade on an exam and Ms. Smith embarrassed her in front of the class,

> Ms. Smith told everybody I got a 36 (F) on my test and she said everybody else did better than that. And that really upset me and I wanted to cry but I didn't. She said that in front of everybody. I don't want to be in her class but I have to because I want to learn and I want to graduate.

Having a disability meant humiliation and embarrassment was the price Rosa had to pay in order to graduate. Even through the embarrassment, Rosa refused to cry. Life in the ghetto had taught her crying was a sign of weakness, and Rosa was anything but weak.

Although Rosa reported she was not embarrassed to have a disability, and her peers never teased her, because she would "punch them out," she could not intimidate Ms. Smith because she held the power to pass or fail Rosa. Rosa described another humiliating incident where she admitted to "being silly" in Ms. Smith's special education class. Rosa was giggling in class, and continued to laugh after being reprimanded by the teacher. In response to Rosa's misbehavior, Ms. Smith told Rosa "to go to the front of the class and perform for everyone." Rosa was embarrassed, saying, "I went up in front of the class and just stood there awkwardly." Even though Rosa did not want to be in the special education class because she felt marginalized, and Ms. Smith was a "bitch," the "real" classes were beyond her reach as a student with disabilities.

The real classes. Rosa feared she could not survive the regular math and English classes because the work was too hard and the regular teachers would not help her. Rosa explained, "It's like with the big classes if it's hard, they'll explain it one time and if you still don't get it, too bad." According to Rosa, her regular education teachers did not give greater access to the curriculum for students with disabilities through modifications and accommodations. Indeed, Rosa shared one of her regular education teachers "sits at his desk and gives us assignments and doesn't help us," which reinforced her belief the real classes were "too hard," and therefore not accessible to her. Although Rosa believed the regular education classes were too difficult, she still dreamed of full inclusion in the "real" classrooms. She explained,

> I'd rather be in the regular ed. classes because it would give me more opportunity as I get ready for college. I'd like to be put in the regular English class. The work is harder but a para would help me. I would like to be with my friends.

Even though Rosa worried about falling behind her abled peers, she was more concerned about being separated from her friends. Separation from abled friends was a worry for every study participant. Rosa was also concerned about her lack of voice when it came to decisions involving her education and her life in general.

Lack of voice. Rosa had little voice in the major decisions affecting her education and future. The state determined where she would live and go to school. The state also determined she would be separated from her siblings. The school determined her educational services and her level of access to a rigorous curriculum and content specialists. Ultimately, Rosa's Individual Education Plan determined Rosa would have less access to the regular curriculum than her abled peers.

66

Rosa attended her last IEP meeting of the 2013 school year. She indicated she did not have a say in the development of the IEP when she complained,

> I want to make my own decisions about my education. Because people make decisions for me and I can't do anything about it or say anything about it. It kinda makes me mad because I don't have a say in my education.

Rosa wanted to have some choice in the special education services she received, but the IEP was written prior to the meeting and no one sought her input in the determination of her services. Rosa's desire to be a pediatrician was not listed in the transition section of her IEP. Therefore, her personal goals were not reflected in the educational services she received. Without a voice in the development of the IEP, Rosa was powerless to change her trajectory.

Rosa's IEP

Rosa's IEP listed her exceptionality as "learning disabled" (LD) and also indicated she takes medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). According to the Differential Ability Scales, 2nd edition, Rosa's intelligence level was "low average, and she demonstrated "relative strength in the verbal domain" although she scored at the 13th percentile. The narrative in the IEP did state Rosa had difficulty with vocabulary during testing because Spanish was her primary language and this barrier likely impacted her score. There was no indication Rosa received any testing in her first language. Rosa's foster mom attended her last IEP meeting, and she reported, "I have no concerns at this time" regarding Rosa's services. The following goals were listed in Rosa's IEP:

1. Rosa will be able to solve and demonstrate knowledge of steps to solve multistep algebraic problems involving positive and negative numbers correctly 2 out of 3 times and,

2. Rosa will choose the correct word 9 out of 10 times on an 8th grade probe for word choice on 4/5 probes.

The IEP also dictated Rosa would receive English and math instruction in the special education setting and para-educator support would be provided in science and social studies in the regular education setting. Rosa would receive help with note taking, task completion, and review as needed. Rosa was also to receive modifications to her instruction including help with reading, shortened assignments, increased time for task completion, and a quiet, separate location as needed.

Rosa indicated a para would take notes for any student receiving special education services. She explained she would receive the notes if she specifically requested them. Rosa also indicated she had help with reading in a separate location, especially on tests. Rosa complained assignments were not modified or shortened. In fact she was emphatic, regular teachers did not change her assignments when she stated, "I do the same papers everyone else does."

Rosa remained remarkably optimistic about her future despite her lack of control over her personal life and absence of voice regarding her educational services. Unfortunately, Rosa accepted less access to the "real" classroom as a normal occurrence for students with disabilities. It remains to be seen if Rosa's tenacity and survival skills will be enough to help her reach her goals.

Summary

Rosa has suffered considerable trauma and loss in her short life. At the very least, she experienced extreme neglect in her birth parents' home. Rosa was separated from Raul, her baby brother, two years prior to the interview. Before placement in foster care, Rosa missed school on a regular basis to care for Raul. Missing school along with her English language deficits likely contributed to her low academic standing.

Rosa does not want to be in special education but she worries about surviving in the regular education world. Rosa believes the regular classes are too hard and the regular education teachers are not willing to modify their instruction to make the content accessible. Rosa did express a desire to be in regular education classes so she could be with friends; she mentioned repeatedly special education separated her from her peers.

Rosa recognized the rigor of her special education classes was less than what her abled peers received and this equated to diminished opportunity for her. She realized she was falling behind, especially in math. Rosa understood the importance of good math skills in achieving her goal to become a pediatrician. However, she received her math instruction from an unlicensed para-educator rather than a highly qualified content specialist.

Rosa disliked her special education teacher. She reported Ms. Smith regularly humiliated her in front of her peers. However, Rosa felt powerless to stop the embarrassment because she wanted to graduate. If Rosa stood up to Ms. Smith, she would not receive passing grades in her special education classes. Rosa was frustrated because Ms. Smith did not give her a voice in the decisions regarding her educational services.

Despite the trauma she suffered, the regular humiliation in her special education classes, and her lack of access to rigorous instruction, Rosa remained optimistic she could accomplish her goal of becoming a doctor. Rosa moved with her foster family to a large metropolitan area in another state in the fall of 2013. She no longer sees Raul each month. Rosa's foster parents are in the process of adopting her.

Maria

At the time of her interview in the spring of 2013, Maria was a 13-year-old 8th grader. Maria is a beautiful young lady of Hispanic descent. She has short dark hair, cut in an edgy style, and funky red glasses frame her brown eyes. She is slightly overweight, and is of average height. Maria is quiet but seems to have a few close friends in her peer group. On the day I observed Maria, she entered the school commons before school, and was quickly joined by two friends. The trio talked excitedly and giggled until the bell rang. Maria proudly reported she "hangs out with some popular girls" during 8th grade, but recalled being bullied the previous year.

I asked Maria to describe the bullying she experienced. Maria explained several peers were shunning her and "spreading rumors" about her. According to Maria, girls were whispering she was a "lesbian" and therefore people wouldn't "hang out" with her. Maria indicated, "Things are much better this year," because she has several close friends, and the rumors have stopped. Friendship was a prominent theme during the interview, and Maria was most concerned with peer perceptions. Indeed, Maria reported she was more comfortable with her friends than her family.

Maria's Family

Maria and her sister, two years her junior, live with their biological parents in a modest ranch-style home in a well-kept neighborhood. Maria's mom is an English as Second Language (ESL) para-educator in an elementary school, and her dad works for a large aircraft engine manufacturer. Maria is often frustrated at home because her younger sister "tattles" if Maria breaks the rules. Maria reported texting her friends at times when she should be doing her homework, and her sister delighted in reporting Maria's dalliances. Maria stated her parents usually take her sister's side during sibling rivalries.

Maria indicated her mom and dad "keep a tight rein" on her; therefore, she has little freedom to hang out with friends outside the school day. Indeed, Maria complained, "My parents decide who I get to hang out with at home and its like Ms. Lopez (SPED teacher) decides who I hang out with at school." Maria blamed her parents and the special education teacher for impeding her social life.

While Maria indicated the "tight rein" held by her parents created tension at home, she reported a smoother relationship with her maternal grandparents. Maria recounted when visiting her grandparents home, she was allowed to indulge in one of her passions: watching music reality contests on television. However, Maria was frustrated at the time of the interview, because her grandparents were traveling and she was unable to keep up with her favorite contestants on *America's Got Talent*. Maria's parents seldom allowed her to watch television.

Maria's Passion

Music was another dominant theme during the interview and Maria's reported obsession. Maria wants to be "famous" when she grows up, and "music is the most important thing" in her

life, and her sure vehicle to fame. Maria loves to sing, and she plans to audition for TV reality

talent shows when she grows up. However, her parents would never allow her to audition for the

shows while she lives under their roof. Maria explained how important music was to her,

> I want to sing. I want to audition for *America's Got Talent* or *American Idol*. Music is
>
> all I think about. It's like the way baseball cards are to a collector-that's how music is to
>
> me. I would like to go [audition] with a group or a duet because I get nervous by myself.

Maria wouldn't dream of auditioning for a music show without the support of her friends. She

emphasized the critical nature of peer support throughout the interview as the only way she could

keep her "head above water" in her academics. She recalled the need for peer support with her

academics beginning in elementary school.

Experiences in Elementary School

Maria reported great memories of her early elementary years and explained she loved her

teachers because they were like her "own mom or grandmother." However things changed in 5th

grade. It was at this point Maria recalled being identified as learning disabled. She recounted

struggling terribly with math and relied on her peers for help. Maria explained she's always had

"trouble in math" but when she was allowed to work in a group she was successful. Maria

reasoned, "I like to work in a group. I don't like to work by myself because I'll mess up without

anyone catching me." Maria clarified what someone "catching" her meant when she stated,

> Like in math there is this problem that is kinda hard and I didn't understand it so I just
>
> went ahead and did it and so I got it wrong. When I have a partner it helps me get the
>
> problem right.

As she mentioned earlier Maria didn't want to attempt difficult tasks by herself. Maria needed her peers to avoid failure or to "catch" her.

However, Maria believed her 5th grade teacher, Mrs. Jones, did not want her to have help from her classmates. She explained students were not allowed to talk during independent math practice in Mrs. Jones' room. Yet, sometimes Maria felt desperate for help with class work. Maria remembered asking peers for help in Mrs. Jones' math class. However, her plea for help led to what she described as humiliating punishment from the teacher. According to Maria, she would ask a friend for help with math and Mrs. Jones,

> Would just start yelling at me. Like, "You need to be quiet and do your work." She would yell at me in front of the entire class. It was embarrassing. She would take me in a room and yell at me.

Maria became fearful of Mrs. Jones, which exacerbated her math anxiety. She explained her struggle with math continued in her current pre-algebra course. She reported,

> Like at the beginning of this year I clicked with it [math] but as the year went on, it got harder. Like this is crazy. Like pre-algebra. I don't know how to do it. We are using letters. What does "x" mean anyways? I don't know.

Maria especially struggled with abstract math concepts. Maria's struggles with math eventually caused her to hide or discard the assignments in middle school. This lack of assignment completion led to increased time in the special education room. Maria resented the increased time in special education because it further separated her from her middle school friends.

Experiences in Middle School

Maria was most concerned with peer relationships during middle school, although academics continued to cause her distress as well. In fact, academics and peer interactions were inextricably intertwined because Maria's difficulty with her coursework and her subsequent special education services brought unwelcome attention from some abled peers. Indeed Maria felt her middle school special education services fostered experiences of mistreatment and humiliation.

Maria reported special education feels like "being punished" for having a disability. Furthermore, this punishment led to teasing and humiliation. Maria felt punished because her IEP dictated her class schedule, and punished because she is separated from her friends for "pull out." Pull out, according to Maria, is when she leaves the regular class with a para-educator to receive extra help on an assignment. Maria explained at times she is escorted from her regular classes by a para-educator so she can have an assignment read aloud. Maria complained, "There are times I don't want to leave the room, but I don't have a choice." The para-educator decided when Maria would leave the regular education setting for help with assignment completion. She resented her lack of choice in the matter and complained the extra help led to teasing. Maria expressed, "Some of the guys make fun of me, and they tease me" when she's pulled from her regular classes. Maria elaborated some abled students would draw attention to her being pulled out when they sang, "Eww, you are in trouble." Maria did not want her special education services to highlight her disability, because she felt "people are laughing at me" in response to her academic struggles. She just wanted to be a regular student.

Maria was concerned abled students would feel she received special treatment because of her disability. She reasoned the perception of special treatment would result in more teasing and embarrassment. Surprisingly, Maria even stated it was "unfair" she received special help while abled students did not receive extra help.

Maria witnessed other students with disabilities suffer teasing. Maria related an incident at lunch when John, an abled peer openly mocked Bob, one of Maria's disabled friends. Maria stated,

> John makes fun of Bob. It just irritates me because I'm in SPED too. At lunch John said, "At least I'm not in special ed." I was like, "Well you know three of us at this table are in SPED." He was like, "Well you know Bob can't read." I said, "Just because he can't read doesn't mean he isn't smart." Bob is really smart.

Even though Maria wanted desperately to fit in and not draw attention to her disability status, she was unwilling to be silent when her friends were teased. Maria's special education teacher agreed in the IEP Maria was compassionate and willing to help her peers.

Regardless of the experiences of humiliation due to her disability, if given the choice to exit special education, Maria reported, "I would choose to stay in special ed. because I need the help." Maria, much like the other study participants believed she could not be successful without special education services. The work was too difficult and the regular education teachers did not offer any help. Maria reiterated, "Without help, I would be struggling even more. It helps me to keep my head above water." Maria believed the reading and homework help she received through special education services helped her make passing grades and kept her out of hot water with her parents.

Even with the extra help though, Maria often found the work in middle school so difficult she admitted, "I feel frustrated. It makes me feel so frustrated I want to get up and throw the table." I was completely surprised by the normally quiet and demure student's admission of aggressive feelings. In the midst of such frustration, Maria reported music was her saving grace.

Maria's favorite class is choir and she explained, "I don't struggle like I do with math. I'm really a good singer." Music classes were where she felt good about herself. However, she reported her schedule did not allow her to be in choir during her 8th grade year. Maria complained, "My schedule is packed with other classes and my mom wanted me to take Spanish, and I have to go into the resource room so there is not time for choir." Maria felt she was denied the opportunity to participate in the one class where her disability did not hold her back, and she traded that opportunity for help with homework in the special education resource room. Maria's inability to pursue her passion compounded her exasperation toward her parents and her special education teacher. Maria's frustration extended to her regular education teachers as well.

The regular teachers. Maria reported she did not receive help from her regular education teachers. She explained the regular teachers never modify their instruction or assignments. She described the lack of modifications to assignments from regular teachers when she stated, "They don't change it." She also explained regular education teachers never work with her in a small group or give her individual attention. If Maria received additional help to "keep her head above water," she primarily relied on non-licensed paras and her peers, not on the regular education teachers. Maria echoed what another study participant stated: regular education teachers did not provide accommodations to make the learning more accessible.

Maria did not advocate for herself by seeking modifications to her assignments. After all, she had learned to remain quiet in 5th grade. If Maria was quiet, no one would notice her disability. Even when Maria attended her annual IEP meetings, her voice remained silent.

Maria's IEP meeting. Maria reported she attended her last IEP meeting. I inquired if the IEP team sought her input in the development of the IEP. Maria explained, "They didn't ask me but they said, "If you succeed, we'll take you out of IRC [interrelated classroom] next year." The interrelated classroom is where students with different types of disabilities receive direct services from a licensed special education teacher or para-educator. The goal of interrelated services is to provide special education services in the least restrictive environment. If Maria improved her assignment completion, eventually she would not be required to spend time in the special education room. Maria responded to her lack of input in the IEP when she stated, "I don't really like it at all." When asked who makes decisions about her special education services she retorted, "Well it's not me. I know that. It's either my parents or my teachers" who decided what services she would receive. The adults in Maria's life made all educational decisions for her without considering what she wanted.

Changes. I asked Maria what she would change about her special education services. She responded, "I would not go to IRC. I would go to choir. Most of the time there are hardly any kids in there during that hour. I don't like being away from my friends." Again, Maria equated special education services as punishment through separation from her peers. Indeed, a review of Maria's IEP revealed she was likely capable of being successful without services in the IRC room.

Maria's Individual Education Plan (IEP)

According to Maria's IEP, her intelligence falls "solidly" within the average range. Maria was administered the Reynolds Intelligence Assessment Scale. Her verbal intelligence was listed at the 47th percentile, and her nonverbal intelligence was listed at the 73rd percentile. However, on the M-Cap (Mathematics Concepts and Applications) Maria scored "well below average." The narrative indicated Maria is very quiet in math class and is hesitant to ask questions. The IEP narrative also quoted Maria's math teacher who reported Maria has difficulty completing assignments and struggles with pre-algebra concepts.

Maria's services include 50 minutes of pull out time each day in the resource room where she receives help with assignment completion. She also receives 200 minutes weekly of inclusion support in Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The inclusion support consists of assignment clarification, task completion, and test taking support.

Mrs. Lopez, the special education teacher, described Maria as kind, caring, and cooperative. Maria was reported to work very well in small groups or with a partner, and is eager to please the adults. However, Mrs. Lopez stated Maria struggles to complete assignments on time and would prefer to complete the work at home. Furthermore, Mrs. Lopez reported, "Some days it seems like she is wasting time by not doing anything." The teacher justified continuation of special education services based on Maria's failure to complete assignments in a timely manner. Maria's mother attended her last IEP meeting, and she reported, "I think she is doing fine" regarding Maria's progress. Maria's IEP goals were:

1. She will read 8th grade level material at 130 words per minute with 90% accuracy.

2. She will perform math computation problems, correctly scoring 35 points on an 8th grade level probe in 10 minutes with 100% accuracy.

Maria's intelligence testing indicated she was of average intelligence and her academic testing indicated she had appropriate grade level skills with the exception of math concepts. It appeared Maria was receiving services because she failed to complete her assignments, not because she had a disability.

In fall 2013, Maria began attending Walnut Grove High School. Maria was ecstatic because she was allowed to enroll in choir. Maria reported math is "going much better" in 9th grade. Maria continues to receive services in the IRC room.

Summary

Maria is a typical teenager. She wants very much to fit in with her peers. Special education services make it difficult for Maria to blend in to the crowd. Maria needs a supportive peer group to succeed academically yet she doesn't want her peers to know she struggles with academics. Maria's parents restricted her access to peers in an effort to help her focus more on her academics.

Maria is very sensitive to her special education label and clearly believed her identification as learning disabled creates problems for her. Maria reported teasing and even bullying as a result of her disability. Maria was identified as learning disabled during 5th grade. Her 5th grade teacher Mrs. Jones was insensitive to her difficulty with math and embarrassed her in front of her peers. This embarrassment intensified Maria's fear of mathematics and taught Maria to keep silent even when she found the work incredibly difficult. Maria resented her special education services and became passively resistive by refusing to complete assignments.

Regardless of her resentment, Maria did not want to discontinue her special education services. Maria believed she could not be successful without the services because her regular education teachers did not modify their instruction to make the learning more accessible. Maria relied solely on her para-educators and peers for help with academics.

Maria loves music and dreams of making it big as a singer. Maria can hardly think of anything other than music. Maria believed her special education services denied her the opportunity to take choir during the 2012-2013 school year.

Maria is of average intelligence yet she struggles with math concepts, which has contributed to her low task completion. Maria preferred to take assignments home so her peers would not see she was having difficulty. Even though her regular education math teacher reported Maria struggled with concepts, the IEP determined the focus of her services would be computational practice.

At the time of the interview, Maria was frustrated with her situation to the point of desperation. She was frustrated with her lack of control over her life and her education. Maria does not have a voice related to her special education services. She was not given a voice during her last IEP meeting. Furthermore, at times she was not given a choice of whether she would work in the regular setting or the special education setting. Maria fantasizes about protesting her situation by throwing classroom furniture. However, she hides this frustration so well her teachers only see her as quiet, kind, and compassionate.

Gene

Gene is a Native American young man. He is almost six feet tall, weighs about 250 pounds, and has a significant case of acne. Gene has an ornery smile and is very curious about

the world around him. He was not shy during the interview and asked nearly as many questions as I did. At the time of the study, in the spring of 2013, Gene was a 14-year old 8th grader.

Gene dreams of making friends, participating in team sports, and playing the bass guitar in the school band. Gene desperately wants to play football and basketball at Walnut Grove Middle School. Gene explained he attends school sporting events because he can always find someone to engage in conversation. Gene exclaimed he was lonely for peer interaction because he has few students in his class. Gene enjoys talking with anyone who will listen to his embellished yarns.

Gene can be a tease and he often exaggerates. For example, he talked about the required prerequisites before using the tools in the school's wood shop. He explained, "Before you can use the tools you have to read a book. It's as big as a phone book. Then you have to take a test." Gene also reported his lunch is often cold and tastes like sand. Gene complained, "Sometimes the peas were all frozen together in one nasty lump. Who wants to eat frozen peas-it's just nasty. And the macaroni; I don't know what it is but the noodles felt like they had sand in them." Gene's hyperbole continued to the discussion of his family when he explained, "As long as they keep kicking, I won't give up." Gene explained his disability made school and life in general very difficult, but he wouldn't give up as long as his parents and grandmother "kept kicking" or remained alive.

Gene's Family

Gene is the middle child, and he lives with his biological parents, a younger sister, an older brother, and his grandmother. At the time of the interview, Gene's sister was in elementary school, and his brother was in high school. Gene reported he did not get along with his siblings

because they do not understand his disability. In fact, Gene complained his brother and sister avoid him as much as possible. Gene reported later in the interview his brother would not protect him in bullying situations.

Gene's mom is a food service worker and the primary breadwinner for the household. Gene stated his mom is the only family member involved in his education and she attends all his IEP meetings. Gene shared his dad works as a mechanic for a quick oil change shop although he is often unemployed. Gene claimed his dad gets angry if the school calls him when there is a problem.

Gene explained he felt especially close to his grandmother because she understands his disability, and according to Gene, "My grandma - she went through the same thing as me." Gene explained he had difficulty managing life with his disability, but he believed his grandmother had similar struggles when she was in school. Gene said his grandmother gives him helpful folksy advice so he can avoid conflicts with his fellow students. For instance, Gene explained he lives by the golden rule on the advice of his grandmother. Gene stated he spent a significant amount of time with his grandmother because she watches him when has out of school suspension. Gene recounted multiple suspensions each month.

Gene's family lives together in his grandmother's rural dilapidated trailer house, which is partially hidden by weeds. The yard is strewn with old vehicles that no longer run, various old rusty lawn mowers, and woodpiles curing for the home's wood stove. The family has very limited financial resources, and the three adults in the home share one car.

Gene's interview was the most difficult and problematic of the four study participants. Gene struggled with the meaning of some questions even when I restated them in the simplest of

terms. During the follow up interview, he often drifted off topic in mid sentence. Even though

Gene was friendly and cooperative, his level of medication made it difficult for him to

concentrate. Gene was identified with conduct disorder, mood disorder, and attention deficit

with hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in 3rd grade.

Gene's Experiences

Gene attends a program for students with behavior disorders. Gene explained he was

placed in the BD program because he would go into a rage and no one in the regular school

could control him. Gene has attended the BD program since 3rd grade because,

> I have a very, very aggressive attitude. Ever since the last time I got removed from my
>
> home, where I went to [lock up] I learned very, very fast because the people were telling
>
> me how I could get out of a situation.

Even though Gene reported he learned from his mistakes while in lock up, he spent much of the

last decade in and out of juvenile detention centers.

Gene stated he would go into rages and threaten his family with knives or other weapons,

including a chainsaw. At other times, Gene destroyed school property by throwing computers or

furniture across the classroom in his BD program. Gene explained he also verbally threatens the

staff in his program. He complained his behavior outbursts sometimes landed him in the

"hospital."

The hospital. Gene last entered a psychiatric hospital in the fall of 2012 for a six-week

period. He described the hospital as a place where he had no freedom when he said, "Its kinda

like jail." While in the hospital, Gene stated he is locked in a room for most of the day except

during mealtimes. Even in this extremely restrictive environment, Gene found ways to

misbehave. He would refuse to obey orders, yelled expletives at the staff, and threw food. He described what happened when he misbehaved while in the hospital. Gene recalled, "If you be bad they'll just put you in a safety hold 'til you calm down. If you be really bad they'll give you a shot to help you calm down." Gene was a recipient of the "shots" and sometimes it required two shots "back to back" before he would calm down. If he received two shots, he would remain locked in his room for at least 72 hours. Gene complained the shots "really hurt." After being discharged from the hospital, Gene continued to have conflict with his classmates. In fact, Gene believed his peers had it out for him.

Peer relationships. Gene reported difficulty with maintaining friendships at school. He explained, "There are those kids that are two faced. They want to be your buddy but then they run off to someone else to be their friend. I have to deal with that every day." Gene desperately wanted friends but he was not compatible with most of his peers. In fact, he felt a constant tension with his fellow students. This tension created an atmosphere where Gene felt he always had to watch his back. Gene did talk about one friend, Stan, who would stick up for him. Gene stated he and Stan,

> have similar lives. We have so much in common. He has went through the stuff I've
> went through before I started getting aggressive. He has learned how to cope. I talk to
> him when I have frustrations. If anybody picks on me he doesn't like it. He sticks up for
> me more than my own brother would.

Gene's own brother was embarrassed by his behavior and would not defend Gene. Therefore, Gene relied solely on Stan for help with bullies. Stan was aggressive at one time but learned to control his anger. Gene found it hopeful Stan had overcome his anger issues. Unfortunately,

84

Stan left the behavior disorder program and Gene felt he had no friends. Without Stan, Gene

reported his experiences of bullying increased.

Bullying. Gene complained he is the regular victim of teasing and bullying especially at

the bus stop. He related, "People tease me and bully me for being on the short bus. They say

I'm a window licker or a booger picker. But I just smile and walk away," as instructed by his

grandmother. Gene was teased in his classroom as well. For instance, he stated, "Johnny throws

paper wads at me until the teacher moves him to another room." Gene stated some of his peers

intentionally "agitated" him but he did his very best to ignore them because "you've got to do

your best and keep your nose clean so you don't get in trouble." Because, "If I get in trouble,

they call the law." Indeed, the police knew Gene very well because of his frequent meltdowns

both at home and school. When Gene's parents could not control him during his "rages" the

sheriff would be called. At school Gene stated he bolts from the school when he becomes angry.

When Gene ran away from school, the police were called as well. Involving the police was part

of Gene's downward spiral. Gene's meltdowns would become more frequent. Once his

behaviors reached a tipping point, the police would get involved and Gene would spend time in

lock up or the hospital.

At the time of the interview, Gene was on probation for making verbal threats. For

instance, Gene might threaten to kill his mom, a teacher, a sibling, or a fellow student. Gene

liked his probation officer though, and explained, "I have a probation officer that comes and sees

me twice a week. And I really have a good relationship with him. We get along awesome."

Gene reported his probation officer and his teachers were helping him overcome his aggression.

At times, Gene explained the school calls the probation officer to help him calm down instead of calling the police.

Gene's Behavior Disorder Program

Gene's behavior disorder program is segregated from his regular education peers. Gene is enrolled at Walnut Grove Middle School; however, he attends a special day school off campus with other behavior disorder students. The day school is reserved for students with acute and severe behavioral disorders. Gene stated he liked his school because he could stay in one room for the entire day. However, Gene also frequently stated he deserved to attend the regular school. In fact, Gene expressed he asked at his IEP to spend part of his day at the regular school. Gene reasoned, "I should get a second chance to show the school how good I can be. I've tried my hardest to get to regular school." Gene expressed a sense of extreme frustration because he was excluded from the regular school. Gene complained he wanted to do the "cool things" only offered in the regular school. He explained,

> I would like to do art. We don't have art in my school. I would like to do pottery. I
> would like to do weights. I can't even play sports. If I go to regular school I can play
> sports. I want to play basketball and football. Football is my favorite.

Gene also wanted to play in the band, but music was not an available in the BD program. Even though he was frustrated by his lack of access to the regular program, Gene liked the teachers in his school.

Gene was largely positive about his teachers and stated they give him extensive help in managing his behavior. Gene explained his teachers help him learn to control his anger when he stated, "They have taught me some coping skills." However, Gene could not remember any

specific anger management skills he had learned. Gene joked when discussing his teachers,

"They put you in ISS for crossing your eyes."

Gene's teacher, Miss Sally, was a new teacher in the fall of 2012. She did not have

special education certification but was teaching under a waiver while she completed her Masters

degree in special education. Gene believed Miss Sally truly understood him and cared for him

because she would give him "big candy bars" for behaving and "she had been through the same

things" as Gene. Again, he was convinced his teachers and other adults that worked with him

suffered from behavior disorders as well. This belief seemed to give Gene hope he would one

day recover from his disability and the cycle of lock up and trips to the hospital would be a thing

of the past.

It was under Miss Sally's tutelage Gene was last sent to the hospital in fall of 2012. Gene

complained Miss Sally sometimes grabs things from his hands, which makes him very angry.

Gene explained he had a small screwdriver that came with a mini skateboard set. Gene received

the skateboard set including the screwdriver from Miss Sally as a reward for good behavior.

When Miss Sally realized he had the small screwdriver, she told Gene to hand it over because

she feared he would use it as a weapon. Gene placed the screwdriver in his mouth. Eventually,

Gene took the screwdriver from his mouth and Miss Sally grabbed it from his hand. As a result,

Gene went into a rage and the police were called. After all, Gene had earned the skateboard with

the included screwdriver. Gene believed this scuffle with Miss Sally was the reason he was sent

to the hospital in the fall of 2012. When Gene was not in lock up or the hospital, he worked

independently on his academics.

Gene's academics. Gene completes his schoolwork on the computer through an online program at the special day school. Gene explained he mostly works by himself unless he "got stuck." When this happened, a para-educator might help him by explaining a concept. Gene explained Miss Sally mainly helped him with his behavior but sometimes she would sit with him while he worked on his English. Gene complained working on the computer for most of the day was "very boring" and sometimes he fell asleep. If Gene did fall asleep, he would likely be sent to the in school suspension (ISS) room for a time out. Sometimes Gene refused to go to ISS, which resulted in a suspension. Gene did not mind a suspension because it meant spending more time with his beloved grandmother.

Gene reported he had some extra curricular opportunities in the afternoon. He stated, "We do shop. We operate heavy tools. I'm building a baseball table." However, Gene's mom reported the program does not have shop class. Gene also stated he participates in physical education although when they play a sport, "the teachers make lame calls." Gene would become angry if a teacher called him "out" when he had three strikes in baseball. Even though Gene liked his school and his teachers, he begged the IEP team for the opportunity to return to the regular school.

Gene's IEP. Gene attended his last IEP meeting where he asked to transition to the regular program for part of the day. The IEP team denied Gene's request, therefore he stormed from the meeting and "slammed the door." Gene explained, "No one listens to me. They don't give a shit what happens to me." Gene felt he had no control over his educational services and no one was willing to listen to him. Gene's mother attended his last IEP meeting and she reported, "I would like for him to spell better" in regard to his academic progress.

Gene's Individual Education Plan (IEP) lists his primary disability as learning disabled (LD). The health section of the IEP stated Gene has Conduct Disorder, Mood Disorder, and Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Gene is on five different medications, including 300 milligrams of Lithium, for bipolar disorder, Celexa for depression, Prazosin for anxiety, Vyvanse for ADHD, and Seroquel for depression. The IEP stated Gene's intelligence ranks among the "top 15% of kids his age," but "comprehension of social structures ranked at the bottom 12%. Gene is very intelligent but he does not relate well to people and his social skills are not age appropriate."

Gene's IEP listed specific special education services, accommodations, modifications, and a behavior plan. Only two specific special education services were listed. These include weekly counseling sessions, and "direct special education services at a special day school for full day programming." The direct special services were not explicitly defined in the IEP. Gene's accommodations per the IEP include a high level of adult support, and modification of pacing, instruction, and assignments. Additionally, Gene may be provided extended time to complete assignments, frequent breaks, and a separate and quiet location as needed.

Gene's behavior plan was based on a points system. Gene earned points for good behavior. If Gene reached a predetermined point level by Friday of each week, he could participate in special activities. Consequences for misbehavior include loss of Friday activities, ISS, and OSS. Gene's special education teacher stated via the IEP,

Gene is very capable of displaying positive work habits and behaviors in the classroom. Some of his behaviors are ignoring staff directives, pounding his fists, pacing, stops

working on tasks, experiences emotional outbursts of anger, leaving the room without

permission, telling tall tales, and profanity toward staff.

The IEP teacher also stated Gene likes PE when he is not required to exercise. The IEP teacher

went on to say Gene participates well with other students during PE.

Summary

Although he is officially labeled as having a learning disability, Gene suffers from

conduct disorder, and his disability requires significant interventions from highly trained

behavior specialists. Gene attends a behavior disorder class in a program segregated from the

regular school population. At the time of the study in spring of 2013, Gene's teacher, Miss

Sally, was in her first year as an educator. She did not have certification as a behavior disorder

teacher. Miss Sally was teaching on a waiver from the state while she worked on her Masters in

special education.

Gene was placed in a psychiatric hospital during Miss Sally's first quarter as a teacher.

Gene liked Miss Sally because she rewarded his good behavior with candy and toys. In one

instance, Miss Sally inadvertently gave Gene a screwdriver. When Miss Sally attempted to

retrieve the screwdriver, Gene refused and a physical altercation ensued. According to Gene, the

screwdriver problem landed him in the hospital. Gene was undoubtedly the most disabled of the

four study participants, yet he had the least qualified teacher.

Gene's behavior dramatically affected his relationships with his family and peers.

Gene's siblings avoided him because of his volatility, and his dad refused to be involved with

Gene's schooling. Gene's mom and grandmother supported him as much as possible but both

women had limited skills in dealing with his severe disability.

Gene reported only one friend, Stan. Stan protected Gene from teasing and bullying. Unfortunately, Stan moved away leaving Gene to fend for himself. Gene was teased and bullied at the bus stop and the teasing continued at school. Gene felt targeted by his classmates, which created a constant tension among Gene and his peers.

Gene receives his education via an online program. Gene becomes bored when working on the computer for extended periods of time. If Gene struggles with a difficult concept, he typically relies on a para-educator for help. Gene does not have access to content specialists in his behavior disorder program.

In the fall of 2013, Gene continued to receive services in the special day school. Miss Sally did not return as his teacher. During December 2013, Gene was arrested at school for the possession of a knife with a blade more than three inches in length. Gene was charged with possession of a weapon and sent to a lock up facility in another city.

This chapter included the findings of the four study participants. Each student shared their educational experiences as a minority student with disabilities. The next chapter includes the conclusions and implications gained from the research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

In this inquiry, the four study participants provided rich descriptions about their lived experiences as minority students receiving special education services. The participants did not discuss race during the interviews, nor did I make race the focus of my questions. I selected the participants for this study because their racial groups are identified for special education services at rates significantly higher than white students (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Theoharis, 2007; United States Department of Education, 2002a). Additionally, minority students with disabilities experience segregated special education services more often than their white disabled peers (Kozleski & Smith, 2005; Skiba, et al., 2008). Through our conversations, each student was able to tell his or her personal story apart from the official story in the participant's individual education plan as written by the adult service providers. Minority students with disabilities are capable of telling their own accounts of their educational experiences, and for those willing to listen, much can be learned from their stories.

Conclusions

Using a critical theoretical perspective and research provided in the review of literature, this study supports three conclusions: (a) study participants have less access to rigorous educational opportunities which has created significant inequity; (b) study participants have been denied a voice, thus preserving the status quo of inequitable educational opportunities; and (c) experiences of inequity and marginalization for the study participants have been normalized. A significant premise of this study is minority students with disabilities have less access to equitable educational opportunities, which in turn has created lower academic achievement, and

92

eventual decreased societal attainment (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Baker, 1995; Mckinley, et al., 2007; National Education Association, 2007).

Minority Students with Disabilities Have Less Access to an Equitable Education

One premise of Critical Disability Theory is society promotes less access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities than abled students. According to this view, students with disabilities have little likelihood of becoming productive adults, therefore limited school resources including content specialists and rigorous curriculum must be allocated foremost to abled students (Davis, et al., 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). The study participants have experienced less access to educational opportunities than their abled peers. Furthermore, the more disabled, and the lower their socio-economic status, the less access the participants had to equitable educational opportunities. Each participant has received a significant amount of their educational services in a setting segregated from their abled peers.

Segregation. Each of the study participants has received some level of segregated educational services. Their segregation from the regular school population has created significant educational inequity. For instance, some of the participants had virtually no access to a content specialist, or high quality curricular or extra curricular activities. The study sites have essentially created a dual education system where the participants received some or all of their instruction in a segregated location. In this dual system, the abled students have full access to all educational opportunities offered by the schools, but the participants have less access to resources necessary for high levels of academic achievement and social attainment. The literature reviewed for this study argued diminished access to equitable educational opportunities is often created when students with disabilities receive segregated services. In fact, the research

93

cited in this study reported some minorities with disabilities are twice as likely to be segregated from their abled peers than other groups (Boone & King-Berry, 2007; Kozleski & Smith, 2005) because a dual education system does not allocate educational resources equally (Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

Critical Disability Theory explains when educational providers subscribe to a pathological view of disability as an unfortunate anomalous physical or cognitive variation from the norm, they deem it impractical to provide equitable educational opportunities to students with disabilities. Indeed, according to this viewpoint, equity would disadvantage "normal" students (Erevelles, 2000). Therefore, segregating the study participants from the regular education population provides greater access to educational opportunities for their abled peers.

Billy and Gene have been segregated from the regular school and thereby denied participation in specialized technical and art programs. In fact, Gene specifically complained he did not have access to music, art, welding, and sports. Billy also did not have access to most electives or work certificate programs; however, he was valued for his athleticism and thus was given access to sports in the regular school program. Both young men did not have access to specialized technology, science labs, or vocational programs such as auto mechanics or woodworking that might have led to employment after high school. These programs were reserved for more abled students. Although the male participants were completely segregated from abled peers, the female participants had access to regular education students. Perhaps gender bias is at play in the research sites where males are seen as more threatening. This is perhaps an area for future study.

While Maria and Rosa attended the regular school, segregated special education services have limited their opportunities to participate in some regular education classes. Maria reported she was especially frustrated she could not participate in choir even though music was her passion and strong suit. Rosa was segregated from regular students for mathematics and language arts. Rosa, as an English as second language student, would have benefited from interactions with abled peer models in the regular English class (Fisher, et al., 2002).

Segregated services for the participants meant regular education teachers had more time to help abled students. After all, Rosa and Maria both stated the regular education teachers never gave them help. Both girls reported receiving assistance in the regular curriculum from para-educators through pull out services. These pull out services provided by non-licensed staff is consistent with prior research indicating regular education teachers often relegate instruction for students with disabilities to less qualified para-educators (Baker, 1995). For the study participants, in addition to segregated services, their degree of disability coupled with levels of poverty also impacted their access to educational equity (Kozleski & Smith, 2005)

Disability and poverty. The severity of the students' disabilities, and their socio-economic status were determinants in the level of educational opportunities the participants were afforded. For example, Gene arguably had the most severe disability and the lowest socio-economic status among the participants, yet he had the fewest educational opportunities and was in the most segregated setting. He had no access to core or elective educational content in the regular education setting. Conversely, Maria had the least severe disability, was the most affluent among the study participants, yet she had the greatest access to educational

95

opportunities. Indeed, Maria was the only study participant included in all core content regular education classes.

Poverty reduces educational equity because it creates significant power differentials between the participants and the schools (Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Indeed, parents in poverty are less likely to advocate for educational equity because they feel powerless and uncomfortable in the school setting. The less parents advocated for their children, the fewer educational opportunities were provided to the students. Three of the four participants are from low socio-economic homes and the data indicated their parents did little more than sign the individual education plans. Indeed, there was no evidence indicating parents complained their children received fewer educational opportunities. During the participants' annual IEP meetings, parents were asked if they had any concerns for their child's education. Examples of parental responses in the IEP's were "I don't have any concerns," "I want them to spell better," or "I think they are doing fine." Maria indicated her parents were very involved in her education and again she had the most access to the regular school experience. The data from interviews and document reviews indicated the other participants' parents did not complain about their children receiving fewer educational opportunities than abled students.

It is likely because knowledge created by unjust systems is so enmeshed in institutions, the participants' parents and educators do not recognize inequitable educational practices such as segregated services as oppressive (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Research supports providing inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, including high quality instructional experts as a means to increase their educational opportunities. However, the participants have received some or all of their instruction from non-qualified teachers or para-educators. This is not

96

surprising considering previous studies concluded many students with disabilities received

significant instruction from non-licensed staff (Baker, 1995; Baker, et al., 1994). Limited access

to content specialists is a significant factor in the participants being denied equitable educational

opportunities and, subsequently, has widened the achievement gap between them and their abled

peers.

       Less qualified instructors. All study participants had less access to highly qualified

instructors than their abled peers. In fact, all study participants have received some or all of their

instruction from either non-licensed paras or non-qualified teachers. Each participant received a

significant part of his or her instruction from para-educators.

       Unfortunately, para-educators have high rates of turnover, and often have insufficient

training to adequately support the needs of students with disabilities (Downing, Ryndak, &

Clark, 2000). Furthermore, regular and special education teachers often lack the knowledge to

adequately guide para-educators in meeting the needs of students with disabilities (French,

1998). Maria's regular education teachers allowed paras to remove her from class on a regular

basis to assist her with assignment completion. When Maria was removed from the regular

class, she had no access to the instructional experts.

       Furthermore, the severity of the disability determined the level of access to qualified

instructors. The system determined Billy and Gene's disabilities made them incapable of

learning to high standards and therefore para-educators or non-qualified teachers were

considered adequate to meet their academic needs. This is consistent with prior research

indicating the best educational resources are often allocated to the most abled students

(Erevelles, 2000). Billy bought into this idea that para-educators were adequate instructors even

97

though he admitted he was academically behind his abled peers. He believed he deserved what he received due to his disability and blamed himself for his circumstances. Billy's thinking is an example of unjust practices becoming acceptable and enmeshed in an institution. Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010), in their analysis of critical social theory, explained when unjust practices are implemented over time, they often become accepted as just or appropriate in educational institutions.

Although Rosa and Maria had varying levels of access to content specialists, neither had access equivalent to their abled peers. Rosa had access to science and social studies content specialists but not math and English experts. Maria had access to all content specialists, but was routinely removed from the regular setting to work with para-educators.

Gene undoubtedly had the highest level of needs, yet he had the least access to qualified instructors. Again, Erevelles, (2000) reminds us educational institutions reserve the best teachers for students demonstrating the greatest potential. Gene manifested the most severe disability among the study participants, yet he received his instruction and behavior support from a non-qualified teacher. In fact, his teacher was the least qualified among the instructors providing services to the study participants. Miss Sally, Gene's teacher did not hold special education licensure nor was she trained to assist with Gene's behavioral disorders. Gene's lack of access to a behavioral specialist increased his misbehavior, which in turn further diminished his access to equitable learning opportunities. For example, his teacher used questionable reward and discipline strategies, such as entering Gene's personal space and snatching items from him.

These questionable discipline strategies contributed to a cycle of suspensions, hospitalizations, and incarcerations. When Gene was not in school, which was much of the time,

he had virtually no access to educational opportunities. This lack of access virtually assures Gene will not have the skills to enter the middle class as an adult (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Mckinley, et al., 2007; National Education Association, 2007). With few academic and social skills, it is likely Gene will continue to be incarcerated throughout the remainder of his schooling and into adulthood.

Billy had the second most serious disability among the participants, and he had only slightly more access to qualified instructors than Gene. Billy's teacher, Ms. Suzy, was a licensed special education teacher, but she was not a math or science content specialist. Furthermore, Billy explained there were too many students in his class for only one licensed teacher. Therefore, if he needed help, a para-educator would provide assistance. Billy's lack of access to content instructional experts left him without the academic skills necessary to obtain meaningful employment after high school. Furthermore, it is unlikely Billy can be successful in a post secondary training program without considerable remedial education, even though he has a high school diploma. Baggier et al. (2004) reminds us less access to educational opportunities is predictive of failure in the post secondary world.

Rosa had more access to instructional content specialist than did Gene and Billy, and indeed, her disability was less severe than that of the boys. Rosa's IEP indicated she did not have access to a licensed math teacher but instead received her mathematics instruction from a para-educator. Each year, Rosa falls more and more behind her abled peers in math. Rosa worried her limited access to a qualified math teacher would disadvantage her when she explained, "the regular math class is ahead of us." She agonized she could not keep up with her abled peers. Additionally, Rosa received English instruction in a segregated class from a general

99

special education teacher rather than a content specialist. Rosa's lack of access to high quality

instructors virtually ensures she too will experience difficulty in any post secondary educational

program (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004).

Maria had the least severe disability among the study participants. Perhaps because of

her higher socio-economic status and higher level of parental involvement, she received her core

instruction including math, reading, science, and social studies from the content specialists in the

regular education setting. Due to her greater access to content specialists, Maria has the highest

academic achievement among the study participants as indicated in her IEP. Her higher

achievement is not surprising considering previous research from the literature supports greater

access to inclusionary services raises the achievement of students with disabilities (Fisher, et al.,

2002).

However, access for Maria did not always equate to equity. For example, Maria reported

the content specialist did not provide assistance beyond what her abled peers received. In fact,

Maria explained the regular teachers never helped her. Instead, if Maria required assistance with

a concept in the regular class, she relied solely on a less qualified para-educator. Maria's regular

education teachers abdicated their responsibility for her learning to less qualified para-educators.

Furthermore, Maria was removed on a regular basis from the regular class to complete her

assignments in a separate or segregated location. A segregated experience for Maria and the

other study participants was always inequitable because it ensured they would experience a

curriculum that was significantly less rigorous than their abled peers (Baker, 1995).

Academic program lacked rigor. Overwhelming research on inclusionary practices

support giving students with disabilities more access to the regular curriculum as a means to

raise their academic achievement (Fisher, et al., 2002). The literature suggests exposing students

with disabilities to a rigorous course of study with accommodations and modifications as the

most effective means of raising the achievement of students with disabilities. However, the

study participants did not always experience a rigorous curriculum. Rosa readily admitted her

schoolwork was considerably easier than that expected of her abled peers. She explained, "It's

easier because you don't really get that much homework in SPED classes." Billy also agreed his

assignments were less demanding than what was offered in the regular school. The participants'

less rigorous curriculum is consistent with previous research. Baker (1995) noted in her

observations of students with disabilities, they were either removed completely from the

classroom or placed in the back of the class. Once students were removed from the classroom

they were given assignments that were much easier than those completed by their abled peers.

Both Rosa and Billy recognized their less rigorous curriculum created an achievement gap

between them and their abled peers. Billy explained because of this gap, he could not return to

the regular education program because he was too far behind. Rosa also noted she had a gap in

her math learning when she worried, "One of my basic fears is the regular math class is ahead of

us and I won't know what they are doing and I won't understand it." A less rigorous curriculum

has further reduced the participants' access to educational opportunities, which in turn has

increased the achievement gap instead of narrowing it.

      The achievement gap has widened. This study also supports previous research that less

educational rigor creates an achievement gap (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). Indeed, the data from

the study participants' psychological and academic testing indicated a significant achievement

gap between the students and their abled peers. Even though all study participants' measured

abilities according to intelligence (IQ) testing fell within or above the average range, testing placed each student's academic achievement below their expected grade level.

Not surprisingly, Billy's final IEP prior to graduation indicated his academic skills after six years of segregated services were equivalent to a sixth grader. Billy's achievement basically stalled after his placement in special education. His low level of achievement was likely a factor in his inability to obtain gainful employment after graduation. Gene and Maria's academic testing also showed a significant achievement gap even though their ability testing placed them in the average to high average range. However, because Maria had the most access to content specialist, she had the least gap in her expected achievement.

Unfortunately, it is likely the study participants' achievement gap will diminish their eventual societal attainment (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004). Furthermore, segregated special education services have diminished the study participants' voices and their ability to protest inequitable learning opportunities. This lack of voice has effectively served to perpetuate inequity for the study participants (Giroux, 1991).

Denied Voices Preserves the Status Quo

The participants have been denied a significant voice in the study sites, which ensures the status quo of their inequitable educational services is maintained. Critical Disability Theory explains a capitalist view supports allocating educational resources in ways that have the greatest positive impact on the economy (Erevelles, 2000). This capitalist view, coupled with a traditional anomalous view of disability, has become embedded within the participants' schools, because, when unjust systems produce such knowledge, the knowledge eventually becomes accepted (Dant, 2003). The schools believe these students are incapable of reaching high levels

102

of academic achievement or producing economic value. Therefore, maintaining the status quo of inequity for the participants is seen as necessary and appropriate (Davis, et al., 2003; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010).

To give the participants a voice in their educational services would serve to disrupt the status quo designed to privilege abled students. Therefore, the study sites muffle the students' voices (a) through means of intimidation; (b) through segregated services; and (c) by allowing the adults to make all educational decisions for the participants. The students learned it was best to remain silent and invisible in the school setting or risk humiliation and intimidation.

Intimidation. The participants learned early in their school careers that silence was an important survival skill. The participants each related instances of humiliation and intimidation perpetrated by adults in the school setting. The data included examples of administration, teachers, and para-educators using humiliation to force participants into compliance. Examples of humiliation in the data included being singled out before peers, being yelled at, or invading the participants' personal space. Therefore the participants learned to remain silent rather than risk embarrassment.

Billy and Rosa indicated they would not protest experiences of inequity for fear they would not graduate. They implied the educators would readily ensure their school failure if they were not compliant. Maria related being singled out and yelled at in front of her peers. She also communicated a sense of extreme frustration related to her special education services. She was frustrated to point she fantasized about acting out in a violent way, yet she never expressed this frustration to her teachers. She was so silent; her teachers failed to see her frustration but

reported she was compliant, helpful, and kind. In addition to intimidation, the participants have received segregated services as a means to diminish their voices.

The critical perspective underpinning this research alleges minority students with disabilities are intentionally silenced through segregated services. When students with disabilities are segregated, it diminishes their opportunity to recognize and voice their concerns about inequitable educational opportunities (Giroux, 1991; Kozleski & Smith, 2005).

Segregation silences voices. Giroux (1991) explained the simple act of segregation serves to silence students. Segregation has reduced the participants' opportunities to protest inequitable educational opportunities because they have less access to those responsible for making educational decisions regarding their services. Additionally, segregated services reduce the participants' attention to the educational opportunities they are missing. Simply put, they will not protest what they do not realize they are missing. Billy and Gene's IEP's were written to ensure they would receive all educational services apart from abled students. Rosa received special education services in the resource room for three hours per day and pull out services during her regular education classes. Maria was in the resource room for one hour per day but was also removed from the regular education classes on a regular basis. With less access to the regular education experience, the participants' voices have been diminished if not extinguished altogether. Since the research sites view the participants as abnormal and incapable of knowing what is in their best interest, the adults speak in their place. Critical Disability Theory argues a traditional conception characterizes disability as pathological, requiring the "expert" adults to speak in place of the students (Fielding, 2001; Weick, 1987).

104

Adults make all educational decisions. The participants' voices have been diminished because the adults speak in their place. Critical theorists assert adults regularly speak in place of students with disabilities without understanding their lived experiences. Indeed adults deny students with disabilities a voice (Fielding, 2001) because such students are viewed as incapable of making judicious decisions about their educational services (Hoskings, 2008).

Weick, (1987) posited a traditional, quantifiable or scientific model of understanding human behavior characterizes those who do not succeed as psychologically flawed. Therefore, so called mentally flawed people lack the capacity to understand what is in their best interest or to speak for themselves. Furthermore, professionals accrue power through acquisition of specialized knowledge. Since their clients lack this same specialized knowledge, they become vulnerable (Weick, 1983) as the professionals make decisions in their place.

Each participant complained the adults at school regularly denied him or her a voice while making decisions that impact their educational services. Maria was emphatic the adults spoke in her place and made all educational decisions for her. She stated, "It's certainly not me," when I asked who makes her educational decisions. Gene complained no one listened to him and he was given no voice when it came to his services. In fact, he walked out of his IEP meeting because no one would listen to him. Billy was not given a voice regarding his final year of special education services. His final IEP was completed prior to the annual meeting and he simply signed the document without comment. Finally, Rosa protested she had no voice in decisions related to her special education services. Indeed, she expressed she very much wanted to be heard but she was not given the opportunity to voice her opinion during her last IEP meeting.

105

The study participants' inequitable educational experiences have been perpetuated by their lack of voice, so the status quo of their special education services could be maintained. Leistyna, (2002) agreed when marginalized groups have no voice, their inequitable experiences do indeed go unchanged. Critical Social Theory and previous research as noted in the review of literature agrees students with disabilities lack a significant voice in public schools (Mitra, 2007; Pugach, 2001; Theoharis, 2007). Dant, (2003) posited when any group, including students with disabilities is silenced, their experiences become obscured or hidden resulting in maintenance of the status quo. Yet another consequence of silencing the study participants is their inequitable educational experiences becomes a normal and accepted occurrence (Dant, 2003) resulting in further inequity and oppression (Giroux, 2000; Pugach, 2001; Theoharis, 2007).

Inequity is Normalized

The data from this study and previous literature support minority students with disabilities inequitable educational experiences are institutionalized and normalized (Giroux, 2000; Pugach, 2001; Theoharis, 2007). As stated previously, a traditional view posits disability is an abnormality. Indeed, viewing disability as anomalous frees people to view inequitable educational practices as a reflection of reality (Jordan, 2012). In other words, it is a common belief minority students with disabilities are abnormal and, therefore, experiences of inequity are not only reasonable, but appropriate or normal. This anomalous conception of disability serves to normalize educational inequity including less access to rigorous instruction, and greater segregation for minority students with disabilities. According to the United States Department of Education (2002a), some minority groups, including African American, Native American, and

Hispanic students, are twice as likely to receive segregated educational services than members of other groups.

As stated previously, Critical Disability Theory purports a capitalist view of society and suggests students with disabilities have little capacity to add value to society; therefore, inequitable educational experiences must be the norm. Kozleski and Smith (2005) posited schools use segregation as an intentional means to privilege abled students above their disabled peers. Indeed, Critical theorists suggest inequity is inherent in segregation (Taylor, 1987). Because students are out of sight and out of mind they have less ability to protest inequity which further serves to normalize their inequitable educational experiences (Giroux, 1991). These participants' educational experiences as students with disabilities have been normalized. In fact, in some cases, the study participants reported their inequitable experiences as normal, appropriate, or even fair.

Billy certainly believed his inequitable educational experiences were normal or as he expressed, "fair." When I asked Billy if his lack of access to content specialist was fair, he responded, "It was fair." Billy believed his placement in the behavior disorder program was a fair tradeoff to avoid incarceration. He also believed the behavior support he received rightly took the place of rigorous instruction. Billy rationalized, "I traded help with my behavior for academics." For Billy and the other participants, their special education services were just the way the world worked.

Billy also saw behavior support strategies implemented by his teachers as normal, when these practices were highly problematic. In fact, Billy believed the behavior strategies teachers used were responsible for his success. Billy described "button pushing" by his teachers as an

intentional support strategy. He explained teachers knew what would set him off and they

intentionally tried to upset him so he would learn to control his anger. Billy surmised the button

pushing was a positive strategy. However, Billy also reported routine discipline suspension,

especially in his first four years of the program. He stated, "That's normal" when discussing his

suspensions. Not only did Billy see his experiences as normal, he placed the blame on himself

for his lack of equitable educational access when he stated, "It was my fault." After all, in his

mind, he chose not to control his anger.

Rosa too saw her services as normal. Although she did not like being in special classes,

and disliked her special education teacher, she did not see her services as unusual or unfair.

Rosa accepted her abled peers attended the "real" classes while she attended special classes,

which were less rigorous. While Rosa realized her classes were less rigorous, she did not realize

she was receiving less access to content specialist. In fact, she barely skipped a beat when I

asked why a para, rather than her special education teacher, taught math. In fact, Rosa never

complained about receiving instruction from a non-licensed para. Rosa did believe her special

classes were designed to catch students up so they could eventually join the real classes. Rosa

did not understand the achievement gap between her and her abled peers widened each year she

remained in special education classes. In fact, her lack of access to content specialist made it

highly unlikely she will ever join the "real classes."

Although Maria had the greatest access to rigorous instruction, among the participants,

routine segregated services were the norm for her as well. She was removed from her regular

classes by para educators to ensure she completed assignments. In addition, Maria was expected

to spend one class period per day in the resource room solely for the purpose of assignment

completion. Even when Maria was in the regular classroom, she reported the content specialist never helped her. Rosa also agreed the regular teachers did not help special education students. The regular education teachers expected students with disabilities to be served by less qualified para-educators, and Maria and Rosa knew not to bother the content specialists when they needed help.

Gene's inequitable educational experiences have been normalized as well. Because Gene did not have access to content specialists or a licensed behavior specialist, he has been caught in a cycle of suspensions and incarcerations for nearly a decade. This cycle, which has created even less access to rigorous instruction, is Gene's normal. Furthermore, for the participants, being disabled made it acceptable to be excluded from extra curricular classes. Gene and Billy did not have access to any of the arts, or shop classes, and Maria reported she could not take choir because she was required to take a resource class. Gene illustrated this exclusion from extra curricular classes and activities when he wished he could do art, pottery, lift weights, and play sports. None of these activities were available to him when they might have served therapeutic purposes. Instead he was isolated and limited to completing academic work online.

For the participants, inequity has become a normal and accepted practice within their schools. Because their educational experiences have become normalized, just as Jordan (2012) asserted, a hegemonic discourse has been achieved. This domination rooted in disability will only be disrupted through a discourse that promotes giving a voice to the participants (Leonardo, 2004).

<center>**Implications**</center>

Providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, including minority students with disabilities, remains a challenge 40 years after a group of parents filed PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a lawsuit seeking access to educational services for children with disabilities. Despite the concerted efforts of parents, advocacy groups, and the federal government, students with disabilities, especially minority students with disabilities, continue to have less access to the regular education curriculum and the regular classroom. As a result of inadequate access to equitable learning environments the achievement gap for minority students with disabilities persists.

Using the critical perspective underpinning this study, Critical Social Theory and Critical Disability Theory, the educational experiences of the participants and their access to educational opportunities were analyzed from the perspective of the students, not from the viewpoint of parents, or other adults within the study sites. From the study participants' views, implications for practice in schools and classrooms arise: (a) foremost, ongoing opportunities for minority students with disabilities to have a voice in the school setting must be provided; (b) regular and ongoing training must be provided to both regular and special education teachers, and para-educators regarding special education law and best practice for students with disabilities; (c) ensure educational resources are allocated in an equitable manner; and (d) create more inclusive educational settings.

Provide Opportunities for Student Voice

Schools should provide opportunities for students with disabilities to have a voice regarding their educational services. The research and theory reinforcing this study clearly

<center>110</center>

support giving a voice to minority students with disabilities regarding their educational services. When schools fail to provide students with disabilities a voice, they risk obscuring their experiences and inequality becomes a normal and accepted occurrence (Dant, 2003). However, when students are given a voice, they are able to challenge assumptions and stereotypes held by adults (hooks, 1989; Kirshner & O'Donoghue, 2001). Furthermore, allowing for student voice increases equality and access to the same experiences and opportunities regular education students enjoy (hooks, 1989; Pugach, 2001).

Schools should consider the wants and needs of students with disabilities in regard to their educational services as a means to ensure equitable opportunities. The students in this study reported they wanted to have a voice in their educational decisions. Indeed, the participants understand their own strengths and certainly have the capacity to make prudent decisions (Weick, 1987) about their education. Each participant thought about his or her future and identified a connection between their educational services and the societal attainment he or she hoped to achieve. Furthermore, all four participants wished for greater access to educational opportunities, but their hopes and dreams were not typically voiced or heard by their teachers. Providing a moment at the end of an annual IEP meeting is not allowing adequate voice for students.

Schools should provide opportunities throughout the year for students with disabilities to dialogue about their educational experiences. Although the study sites gave the semblance of voice to the participants during the annual IEP meetings, the data did not indicate students were engaged in meaningful conversations about their educational experiences with the adults that attended the reviews. IEP meetings are not typically conducive to providing students with a

111

voice. Students with disabilities may feel intimidated by the large number of professionals that typically attend an IEP meeting. Furthermore, the adults are often under scheduling constraints that do not allow adequate time for students to discuss their educational experiences. Waiting until the annual IEP meeting to provide students a voice simply stifles their ability to protest experiences of inequity. Schools that engage in professional development aimed at providing high quality educational opportunities for all students typically ensure all students have a voice in the school setting. These schools are typically engaged in high quality professional development aimed at giving universal access to a rigorous course of study for all students.

Provide Ongoing Professional Development

Schools should ensure all administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff, including para-educators, engage in regular and ongoing professional development regarding special education laws and effective educational practices. A collaborative effort among regular education teachers, special education teachers and para-educators has proven an effective model to support the learning needs of students with disabilities (Downing, et al., 2000; French, 1998). Training should be aimed at giving greater access to the regular education experience for students with disabilities by training para-educators and licensed teachers to work together. The Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) states schools must ensure students with disabilities have the greatest access possible to the regular education classroom and curriculum in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004; Kozleski & Smith, 2005). Attention to special education laws would aid in providing a more equitable education for students with disabilities; many educational service providers simply are ignorant of the law. Access to the regular education curriculum and

112

instruction would improve the academic achievement of the participants and improve their eventual societal attainment (Fisher, et al., 2002).

Regular and special educators should be provided with training that promotes universal learning access for all students. Just as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires facilities open to the public be accessible through architectural design including ramps, wider doors, elevators, and handicap accessible restrooms (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990), schools should focus on professional development that makes learning accessible for all students. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) encourages teachers to design curriculum that is adaptive to a wide range of learners. UDL ensures access to high quality learning for all students through flexible curriculum and content. UDL is not focused on revamping curriculum, but rather designing curriculum and instruction that is "flexible and adaptable to all forms of learning and engagement to facilitate the learning of all students" (Lancaster, 2011, p.3). As educational service providers gain knowledge of best practice related to providing equitable learning opportunities, they will begin to recognize unjust practices embedded in their institutions.

Finally, schools should provide staff ongoing training designed to support the behavioral needs of students with disabilities. Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) focuses on proactive intervention to improve behavioral outcomes. For instance, using PBIS, schools take responsibility for teaching appropriate behavioral and social skills as much as they would skills in math or science (Sugai & Horner, 2002). PBIS could provide alternative behavior support strategies to replace questionable punitive behavior interventions, such as those used at the research sites, including the use of humiliation, yelling, invasion of personal space, and the snatching of items from the participants. As teachers gain new behavior support skills,

113

suspension and expulsions will be reduced, thereby giving students with disabilities greater access to educational opportunities.

Ensure Equitable Allocation of Educational Resources

Schools should ensure an equitable allocation of educational resources, including access to content specialists, rigorous curriculum, and extra curricular activities for students with disabilities. Ensuring equity in educational services for students with disabilities greatly improves their academic and social success (Fisher, et al., 2002). In fact, schools should provide the most needy students with the most qualified teachers. Gene's school provided him with a non-qualified teacher. Therefore, his disability became more acute because of his teacher's lack of competence. Rosa received her math instruction from a non-licensed para-educator. While it is unreasonable in the current economic climate to expect para-educators will not provide some instruction for students with disabilities, core content instruction should be provided by highly qualified licensed teachers. When schools deny students equity, they become victims of educational malpractice, which increases their inequitable educational experiences.

Schools should especially ensure students experiencing behavioral difficulties or academic failure have access to hands-on learning, such as technical and vocational educational programs. Billy and Gene did not have access to such classes. Instead, they were forced to sit in front of a computer for much of the day, which likely contributed to their behavioral difficulties. As mentioned previously, Critical Disability theorists posit disability is a construction of society; specifically, the environment, not the anomaly, creates disability. (Hoskings, 2008). In other words, when schools fail to allocate resources equitably, they

114

contribute to a disabling environment. Failure to ensure equity in any school system will likely create a greater drain on society as students grow into adulthood.

Create More Inclusive Educational Settings

Schools should create more inclusive educational settings for students with disabilities. It should come as no surprise, when students with disabilities have access to content specialist, rigorous curriculum, and peer models, they achieve at levels significantly higher than students in segregated programs (Skiba, et al., 2008). As stated previously, the study data indicated a correlation exists between the amounts of time a participant was included in the regular education setting and their level of achievement. For example, Maria received the most inclusive services and she had the highest student achievement even though she did not have the highest ability scores. Although Gene had the highest ability scores, he achieved significantly below expected levels because he was completely segregated from the regular education population. Simply put, schools should ensure the most needy students have access to the best teachers and a rigorous curriculum. This can only happen in an inclusive school setting.

In order to promote inclusionary practices for students with disabilities, schools should reject the pathological conception of disability. When schools adopt such a view, the student is seen as a patient requiring specialized (segregated) treatment that can only be provided in a separate location (Biklen, 1988). Such practices would otherwise be considered discriminatory for abled minority groups (Biklen, 1988; Bogdan & Taylor, 1982).

Finally, schools should promote more inclusion by appealing to teachers and other educational providers' sense of morality. School leaders might ground this appeal in a historical context that includes stories of other groups' struggles for equality or inclusion, such as Brown v.

the Board of Education. After all, the highest court in the land ruled, "separate education is inherently unequal" (Taylor, 1987).

This chapter included the conclusions and implications drawn from the interviews of four minority students with disabilities about their school experiences. This study supports previous research indicating minority students with disabilities experience inequitable learning opportunities, marginalization, and silence in the school setting (Giroux, 1991). Because the participants lacked a significant voice in the educational setting, their experiences were obscured, which has created greater inequities (Dant, 2003). All study participants agreed they lack a significant voice or input in their educational decisions. Indeed, the parents and teachers routinely spoke for or in place of the participants. Without a voice, they will forever be denied access to an equitable education (Davis, et al., 2003).

LIST OF REFERENCES

References

Achilles, G. M., McLaughlin, M. J., & Croninger, R. G. (2007). Sociocultural correlates of disciplinary exclusion among students with emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities in the seels national dataset. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 15*(1), 33-45.

Algozzine, B., Browder, D., Karvonen, M., Test, D., & Wood, W. (2007). Effects of interventions to promote self determination for individuals with disabilities. *Review of Educational Research, 71*, 219-277.

Americans with Disabilities Act, Pub. L. No. 110-325 (1990).

Apling, R., & Jones, N. (2008). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Overview and selected issues (pp. 1-6). Washington D. C.: Congressional Research Service.

Artiles, A. J. (2000). The inclusive education movement and minority representation in special education: Trends, paradoxes, and dilemas. Manchester, UK: International Special Education Conference.

Artiles, A. J., Harris-Murri, N., & Rostenberg, D. (2006). Inclusion as social justice: Critical notes on discourses, assumptions, and the road ahead. *Theory into Practice, 45*(3), 260-268.

Baglieri, S., & Knopf, J. H. (2004). Normalizing difference in inclusive teaching. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(6), 525-529.

Baker, J. M. (1995). Inclusion in Virginia: Educational experiences of students with learning disabilities in one elementary school. *Journal of Special Education, 29*(2), 116-123.

Baker, J. M., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. (1994). The effects of inclusion on learning. *Educational Leadership, 52*, 33-36.

Barrera, M. (2006). Roles of definitional and assessment models in the indentification of new or second language learners of English for special eduction. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*, 142-156.

References (continued)

Barron, C. L. (2000). *Giving youth a voice: A basis for rethinking adolescent violence*. Halifax, Nova Scotia Fernwood Publishing.

Biklen, D. (1988). The myth of clinical judgment. *Journal of Social Issues, 44*(1), 127-140.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Bogdan, R. C., & Taylor, S. (1982). *Inside out*. Toronto: Universtiy of Toronto Press.

Boone, R. S., & King-Berry, A. (2007). African American students with disabilities: Beneficiaries of the legacy? *Journal of Negro Education, 76*(3), 334-345.

Brayboy, B. M. J., Castago, A. E., & Maughan, E. (2007). Chapter 6 equality and justice for all? Examining race in education scholarship. *Review of Research in Education, 31*, 151-194. doi: 10.3102/0091732X07300046159

Brownell, M. D., Hirsch, E., & Seo, E. (2004). Meeting the demand for highly qualified special education teachers during severe shortages: What should policymakers consider? *The Journal of Special Education, 38*(ß1), 56-61.

Bryant, T. J. (1998). The death knell for school expulsion: The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act. *The American University Law Review, 47*(5), 487-554.

Burnstein, N., Sears, S., Wilcoxen, A., Cabello, B., & Spagna, M. (2004). Moving toward inclusive practices. *Remdial and Special Eduction, 25*, 104-116.

Calhoun, C., & Karaganis, J. (2001). Critical theory. In G. Ritzer & B. Smart (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Theory* (pp. 179-200). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cooper-Duffy, K., Szedia, P., & Hyer, G. (2010). Teaching literacy to students with significant congnitive disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 42*(3), 30-39.

References (continued)

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundation of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Daniel, S., Walsh, A. K., Goldston, D. B., Arnold, E. M., Reboussin, B. A., & Wood, F. B. (2006). Suicidality, school dropout, and reading problems among adolescents. *Journal of Learning Disability, 39*(6), 507-515.

Dant, T. (2003). *Critical social theory: Culture, society and critique*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davis, A., Corker, M., & Shakespeare, T. (2003). Reconstructing disability, childhood and social policy in the U.K. In child welfare and social policy: . In C. Hallett & A. Prout (Eds.), *Hearing the Voices of Children: Social Policy for a New Century* (pp. 192-210). London, U.K.: Routledge Falmer.

Denzin, N. (2001). *Interpretive interactionism* (Vol. 16). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department of Education. (2012). *State report card*. Retrieved from http://www.ksde.org.

Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D. L., & Clark, D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms: Their own perceptions. *Remdial and Special Eduction, 21*, 171-181. doi: 10.1177/074193250002100308

Education of all Handicapped Act, Pub. L. No. 91-230, 84 stat. 175, Part B (1975).

Erevelles, N. (2000). Pedagogy, disability, and theory. *Educational Theory, 50*(1), 25-47.

Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fielding, M. (2001). Students as radical agents of change. *Journal of Educational Change, 2*, 123-141.

References (continued)

Fisher, D., Roach, V., & Frey, N. (2002). Examining the general programmatic benefits of inclusive schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 6*(1), 63-78.

Freeman, M., & Vasconcelos, E. F. S. (2010). Critical social theory: Core tenets, inherent issues. *New Directions for Evaluation, 127*, 7-19.

French, N. (1998). Working together: Resource teachers and paraeducators. *Remdial and Special Education, 19*, 357-370.

Fusarelli, L. D. (1999). Reinventing urban education in Texas: Charter schools, smaller schools, and the new institutionalism. *Education and Urban Society, 31*, 214-224.

Garfinkle, A. N., & Schwartz, I. S. (2002). Peer imitation: Increasing social interactions in children with autism and other developmental disabilities in inclusive preschool classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 22*(1), 26-38.

Gartner, A., & Lipsky, D. (1987). Beyond special education: Toward a quality system for all students. *Harvard Educational Review, 57*, 367-395.

Giroux, H. A. (1991). Curricula planning, public schooling, and democratic struggle. *NASSP Bulletin, 75*, 12-25.

Giroux, H. A. (2000). *Stealing innocence: Youth, corporate power, and the politics of culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Griffin-Basas, C. (2008). Critical disability theory: Essays in philosophy, politics, policy, and law. *The Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal, 4*(4), 59.

Handler, B. R. (2007). Who's in the classroom down the hall: An examination of demographic shifts within segregated special education classrooms. *American Education History Journal, 34*(2), 379-393.

hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back*. Boston: South End Press.

References (continued)

Hoskings, D. L. (2008). *Critical disability theory*. Paper presented at the Biennial Disability Studies Conference, Lancaster U.K.

Individuals with Disabilites Education Act, United States Congress, Pub. L. No. 105-17 (1997).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Pub. L. No. U.S.C 1400 (1990).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, United States Congress, Pub. L. No. 108-446 (2004).

Jia, W. (2001). *The remaking of the Chinese character and identity in the 21st century*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

Johnson, D. M. (2004). Universal instruction design and critical communication pedagogy: Strategies for voice, inclusion, and social justice/change. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 37*, 145-153.

Jordan, K. A. (2012). Discourses of difference and the overrepresentation of Black students in special education. *The Journal of African American History, 90*, 128-149.

Katsiyannis, A., Yell, M. L., & Bradley, R. (2001). Reflections on the 25th anniversary of the individuals with disabilities education act. *Remedial and Special Education, 22*, 324-334.

Kaufman, M., & Agard, J. A. (1989). The regular education initiative as Regan-Bush education policy: A trickle-down theory of education of the hard to teach. *The Journal of Special Education, 23*(3), 256-278.

Kaufman, M., Agard, J. A., & Semmel, M. I. (1986). *Mainstreaming: Learners and their environment*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline.

Kavale, K. A., & Forness, S. R. (2000). History, rhetoric, and reality: Analysis of the inclusion debate. *Remdial and Special Eduction, 21*, 279-295.

References (continued)

Kinchloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kirshner, B. R., & O'Donoghue, J. L. (2001). *Youth-adult research collaborations: Bringing youth voice and development to the research process*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, Seattle, WA.

Klotz, M. B., & Nealis, L. (2005). The new IDEA: A summary of significant reforms. *National Association of School Psychologist*, 1-7.

Kozleski, E. B., & Smith, A. (2005). Witnessing Brown. *Remdial and Special Eduction, 26*(5), 270-280. doi: 10.1177/07419325050260050201

Lancaster, P. (2011). Universal design for learning. *Special Education & Technolgy Learning, 4*(8), 1-3.

Leistyna, P. (2002). *Defining and designing multiculturalism: One school system's efforts*. Albany, NY: New York Press.

Leonardo, Z. (2004). Critical social theory and transformative knowledge: The functions of criticism in quality education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(6), 11-18. doi: 10.3102/0013189X033006011

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lipsky, D., & Gartner, A. (1997). *Inclusion and school reform: Transforming America's classrooms*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Maag, J. W., & Reid, R. (2006). Depression among students with disabilities: Assessing the risk. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*(3), 3-10.

McCarty, K. (2006). *Full inclusion: The beneifits and disadvantages of inclusive schooling.* Azusa Pacific Universtiy.

References (continued)

Mckinley, B., Jones, B., Castagno, A. E., & Maughan, E. (2007). Chapter 6 equality and justice for all? Examining race in education scholarship. *Review of Research in Education, 31*, 159-194. doi: 0.3102/0091732X07300046159

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mitra, D. (2007). Student voice in school reform: From listening to leadership. *International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School*, 727–744.

Morgan, P. L., Frisco, M. L., Farkas, G., & Hibel, J. (2008). A propensity score matching analysis of special education services. *Journal of Special Education, 43*(4), 236-254.

National Education Association. (2007). Truth in labeling: Disproportionality in special education Retrieved July 1st, 2012, from http://www.nea.org/specialed/disprportionality.html

Nibert, D. (1995). The political economy of developmental disability. *Critical Sociology, 21*, 59-80.

No Child Left Behind Act, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq. (2001).

Otis-Wilson, A., Winn, J., Griffin, C., & Kilgore, K. (2005). Beginning special educators' forays into general education. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children, 28*(3), 143-153.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

References (continued)

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity: One's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-21.

Pugach, M. C. (2001). The stories we choose to tell: Fulfilling the promise of qualitative research for special education. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 439-453.

Reder, N. (2007). Accountability for students with disabilities Retrieved October 12, 2012, from http://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/Documents/1_Accountability FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.pdf

Rioux, M. (1999). Inclusive education in Canada: A piece in the equality puzzle. In F. Armstrong & L. Barton (Eds.), *Disability, Human Rights and Education* (pp. 87-99). Philadephia: Open University Press.

Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2009). *Qualitative research practice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Roach, V. (1999). Curriculum, instruction, placement: Three legs of the achievement stool. In D. Fisher & I. Pumian (Eds.), *Inclusion High Schools: Learning from Contemporary Classrooms* (pp. 145-156). Baltimore: Brookes.

Sandlin, J. (2002). Structure and subjectivity: Reflections on critical research. In S. B. M. Associates (Ed.), *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 371-373). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Sayler, M. (2007). *Tracking humilitation with coordinated management of meaning*. Paper presented at the Human Dignity and Humiliation Workshop.

Skiba, R. J., Poloni-Staudinger, L., Gallini, S., Simmons, A. B., & Feggins-Azziz, L. R. (2006). Disparate access: The disporportionality of African American students with disabilities across edcuational environments. *Exceptional Children, 72*, 411-422.

Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, A. C., Rausch, M. K., Cuadrado, J., & Chung, C. G. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status and current challenges. *Exceptional Children, 74*(3), 264-288.

References (continued)

Smith, & Erevelles. (2004). Towards an enabling education: The difference that disablity makes. *Educational Researcher*, 31-36.

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (2002). Introduction to the special series on positive behavior support in schools. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 10*, 130-135. doi: 10.1177/10634266020100030101

Taylor, S. J. (1987). *Purposeful integration*. Boston: TAPP.

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(2), 221-258. doi: 10.1177/0013161x06293717

Thomkins, R., & Deloney, P. (1995). Inclusion: The pros and cons. *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 4*(3), 20-24.

Trainor, A. A. (2008). Using cultural and social capital to improve postsecondary outcomes and expand transition models for youth with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education, 42*(4), 148-162.

Turnbull, H. R. (2005). Individuals with disabilities education act reauthorization : Accountability and personal responsibility. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*, 320-326.

Turnbull, H. R. (2009). Education and students with specific learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 32*(1), 3-8.

United States Department of Education. (1997). Nineteenth annual report to congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilites Act Retrieved August 21, 2011, from http://www.ed.gov

United States Department of Education. (2002a). The civil rights project: Racial inequality in special education Retrieved January 10, 2010, from http://www.ed.gov

References (continued)

United States Department of Education. (2002b). Comprehensive school reform program guidance Retrieved October 26 2010, from http://www.ed.gov

United States Department of Education. (2010). Thirty-five years of progress in educating children with disabilties Retrieved July 1, 2011, from http://www.ed.gov

Vallas, R. (2009). The disproportionality problem: The overrepresentation of Black students in special education and recommendations for reform. *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law, 17*, 181-208.

Villa, R. A., Thousand, J. S., Nevin, A., & Liston, A. (2005). Successful inclusive practices in middle and secondary schools. *American Secondary Education, 33*(3), 33-50.

Wagner, M. (1989). Preschool integration from teacher and parent perspective. *ERIC Document Reproduction*.

Wakelin, M. M. (2008). Challenging disparities in special education: Moving parents from disempowered team members to ardent advocates. *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy, 3*, 263-288.

Walnut Grove Public Schools. (2014) Retrieved March 6th 2014, from http://www.walnutgrove.com

Weick, A. (1983). Issues in overturning a medical model of social work practice. *National Association of Social Workers*, 461-467.

Weick, A. (1987). Reconceptualizing the philosophical perspective of social work. *Chicago Journals, 61*(ß2), 218-230.

Wiener, J., & Tardif, C. Y. (2004). Social and emotional functioning of children with learning disabilities: Does special education placement make a difference? *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 19*(1), 20-32.

References (continued)

Will, M. (1986). Educating students with learning problems: A shared responsibility. Washington D.C.: Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Zigmond, N., Jenkins, J., Fuchs, L. S., Deno, S., Fuchs, D., Baker, J. N., . . . Couthino, M. (1995). Special education in restructured schools: Findings from three multi-year studies. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(7), 531-540.

Zirkel, P. A. (1986). Inclusion: Return of the pendulum? *The Special Educator, 12*, 25-36.

APPENDICES

Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology

Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Student Consent Form

(students 18 years of age or older)

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a study of the educational experiences of special education students at your school. I hope to learn student perceptions of their opportunities and barriers to learning and full participation in the school community.

Participant Selection: 4-6 participants are sought to participate in classroom observations, and individual interviews. You were selected as a likely participant because you receive special education services at your school. You will be asked to participate in an individual interview and allow me to observe you at your school.

Explanation of Procedures: Your participation will consist of one individual interview that will take approximately 30 minutes. You may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview and a classroom observation that will last approximately 45 minutes. With your permission, I will digitally-record the interviews, and notes will be taken during the observations. A transcript of your responses in the interview will be made available to you to ensure accuracy and to allow you an opportunity for additional feedback.

Discomfort/Risks: All information gained during the interviews and observations will remain strictly confidential and no risk to you or your peers is anticipated. You are requested to be open and honest during the data collection. Your involvement in all data collection will be voluntary, and all participants will be made aware of the purpose for research and their rights as research subjects.

Benefits: If you participate, you may benefit by gaining a better understanding of the educational experiences and opportunities of students receiving special education services. All stakeholders may benefit from having an opportunity to be heard regarding their views on special education services. So that others might benefit from what we learn, the researcher plans to share the results of this study through presentations at state and national conferences and publications in scholarly journals.

Confidentiality: All information gained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will <u>not</u> affect your future relations with your school, or Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me: Mark Whitener, at Phone #(620) 455-2227, Email markwhitener@usd358.com or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson, at Phone #(316) 978-6392 or Email jean.patterson@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office

of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, Phone #(316) 978-3285.

You are in no way required to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and agree to participate.

___Interview

___Classroom Observation

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____

Signature of Subject   Date

Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology

Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

Parent Consent Form

Purpose: Your child is invited to participate in a study of special education students' perceptions of their educational experiences in a regular school setting. I hope to learn student's perceptions of their opportunities and barriers to learning.

Participant Selection: Six students are sought to participate in observations, focus groups, and/ individual interviews.   Your child was selected for this study because he or she receives special education services. Your student may participate in an individual interview.

Explanation of Procedures: Your student's participation will consist of an interview that will take approximately 30 minutes. With your permission, the researcher will digitally record the interview to allow for thorough analysis of the data.

Discomfort/Risks: During the interview your student is encouraged to be open in his or her answers to the questions. All responses will be kept confidential and there are no anticipated risks. All participation by your student will be voluntary, and her or she will be made aware of the research purpose and their rights as research subjects.

Benefits: If you allow your student to participate, his or her responses will help educational providers understand the educational opportunities provided to special education students from the student perspective. So that others might benefit from this

research, I plan to disseminate the results of this study through presentations at state and national conferences and publications in scholarly journals.

Confidentiality: Any information gathered in this study in which your student might be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with parental permission.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Student participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your student to participate will <u>not</u> affect your future relations with school district. If you allow your child to participate in this research, you are free to withdraw him or her at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me: Mark Whitener, at Phone #(620) 455-2227, Email markwhitener@usd358.com or my advisor, Dr. Jean Patterson, at Phone #(316) 978-6392 or Email jean.patterson@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, Phone #(316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to have your student participate in this research. Your signature indicates that you have read the above information and have voluntarily decided to permit your student to participate.

Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

_____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian   Date

Student's Name (Print)

_____

Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology

Campus Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate, if I want to, in a study about my experiences in special education. My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop at any time. If I choose not to participate, my grade will not be affected in any way.

_____

Name   Date

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your school. What do you like or dislike about your school?

2. Describe your favorite teacher at your school.

3. Describe a learning activity you've really enjoyed.

4. Describe how you are treated by your peers? Teachers?

5. Describe what it means to be in special education?

6. Why are you in special education? Do you want to be in special education?

7. Describe the special education program at your school.

8. Do you attend regular education classes, or do you attend special education classes?

9. How are special education classes different from regular education classes?

10. Do you have the same learning opportunities that regular education students have? Explain.

11. Is your schoolwork easier or harder than regular education students? Why do you think so?

12. What activities such as band, drama, sports, and clubs do you participate in? Why? Why not?