

AN EXAMINATION OF PRACTICES FOR REDUCING THE
OVERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN THE MENTAL
RETARDATION/INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY ELIGIBILITY CATEGORY

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY ELIGIBILITY CATEGORY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to describe district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge. One suburban school district was purposefully selected as it no longer was identified as being significantly racially disproportionate. The researcher conducted two focus groups and three interviews. The two focus groups consisted of a total of ten K-12 special education process coordinators divided into two groups. From those focus groups, two process coordinators were chosen based upon their knowledge from the focus groups for individual interviews to gather further information one-on-one instead of in a group setting. A third individual interview consisted of an elementary special education teacher. Data were collected using audio-recorded focus groups and interview and a review of district documents. Three themes emerged from the data: 1) impact of dialogue on knowledge creation, 2) impact of dialogue on determining further district needs, and 3) implementation of district-wide initiatives for change. Implications of the study could assist other school districts who have been identified as significantly racially disproportionate.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

In the 1950s and 1960s approximately 60 to 90 percent of students with disabilities were not provided an appropriate education (*The Handicapped*, 1977). As a result, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (Public Law 94-142) enacted by Congress in 1975 mandated the right of students with disabilities to receive a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (*The Handicapped*). At the time “about half of the nation’s eight million handicapped children still had not received an appropriate education” (*The Handicapped*, p.9). Some students with disabilities had been denied access to public schools while other students received an education inferior to their peers without disabilities (*The Handicapped*; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). While half of all students with disabilities did not receive an appropriate education, minority students were already being identified as being disabled at a disproportionate rate and were often placed in the most restrictive settings (Ysseldyke & Algozzine).

Since the 1960s, prior to Public Law 94-142, racial disproportionality in special education was already a concern (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Dunn, 1968; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). As early as 1968, racial disproportionality in special education was identified as a problem for students labeled as mildly mentally retarded/intellectually disabled (Dunn). In fact, since 1968 the Office of Civil Rights has conducted the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), formerly the Elementary and Secondary School Survey, to collect data on key education and civil rights issues. These surveys have consistently found Black students to be “overrepresented in the categories of mental retardation (MR)

and emotional disturbance (ED)” (Hosp & Reschly, 2004, p. 186). By 1976-1977, Black students were placed in classes for students who were Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled at 3.4 times the rate of Whites (Smith, 1983). The rate increased to 3.5 times greater than Whites by the 1978-1979 school year (Smith). Congress commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to study racial disproportionality in special education in 1982 and again in 2002. During the 20 years between studies, racial disproportionality was found to have persisted (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

The reauthorization of the Individuals with *Disabilities Education Act of 1997* (IDEA 1997) required access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities as Congress determined the progress of students with disabilities was “impeded by low expectations” (IDEA 1997, p.5). Furthermore, IDEA 1997 identified that while 16% of K-12 students were Black, 21% of Black students were identified as students with disabilities (IDEA 1997). Subsequently, since 1998 the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has gathered data regarding overrepresentation (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschley, 2004).

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, increased attention has been given to racial disproportionality in special education (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010). The 28th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (US Department of Education, 2009) reported black students were 1.5 times as likely to be labeled with a disability as all other racial groups put together. In fact, Black students were three times more likely to be labeled mentally retarded/intellectually disabled than all other racial groups combined (Parrish, 2002).

The IDEA 2004 required states to develop a state performance plan which includes targets for each performance indicator (MO DESE, 2011). In addition, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must report publicly on the status of each indicator for the state and for each LEA within the state (MO DESE). In Missouri, indicators 9 and 10 relate to disproportionate representation as the result of inappropriate identification of students as disabled (MO DESE). Indicator 9 refers to disproportionate representation in special education and related services while indicator 10 relates to disproportionate representation in certain disability categories (MO DESE).

During the 2010-11 school year, DESE reported Missouri's total enrollment of students to be 889, 387 (2011a). Approximately, 1.17% of the total population of K-12 students has been identified as eligible for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability while 0.76% have been identified as Emotionally Disturbed (MO DESE 2011a; MO DESE 2011b). DESE reported 17.07% of all Missouri K-12 students were Black while 19.21% of special education students were Black (MO DESE 2011a; MO DESE, 2011b). In comparison, DESE reported 74.74% of the state's enrollment was White while 74.44% of all special students were White (MO DESE, 2011a; MO DESE, 2011b). In the two eligibility categories resulting in the most restrictive placements—Emotional Disturbance and Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability—28.87% and 29.99% respectively of special education students were identified as Black while 66.59% and 64.24% were identified as White (MO DESE, 2011b).

IDEA requires states to determine significant disproportionality by collecting and analyzing data related to child counts. The act does not have in place a requirement of analyzing a district's policies, procedures, and/or practices (OSERS, 2006) that may

result in overrepresentation. An analysis of child count data will not address root causes of and possible strategies for racial disproportionality that is a result of inappropriate identification.

Inappropriate identification is more likely to occur in judgmental rather than nonjudgmental categories (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Duran, Riley, 2005; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). Nonjudgmental categories include low incidence categories with clear medical or physical cause which requires "limited inference on the part of professionals" (O'Connor & Fernandez, p. 6). Judgmental categories "capture subtle disabilities for which there is usually no known organic cause and for which diagnosis rests on the 'art' of professional judgment" (O'Connor & Fernandez, p. 6). Professional judgment is typically determined by school personnel and occurs after a student has failed at school (Klingner et al., 2005). Judgmental categories include mild mental retardation/intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, and learning disability (O'Connor & Fernandez).

In 2010, DESE changed criteria for MR/ID to remove professional judgment. However, once a student is initially identified as disabled, there is no requirement that initial eligibility criteria be met for subsequent reevaluation (DESE, 2010), so appropriate initial identification is paramount. While Donovan and Cross (2002) identified inappropriate referrals for special education as a factor contributing to racial disproportionality and research has often focused upon referrals and pre-referral strategies (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Donovan & Cross), the inappropriate identification of students, also identified by Donovan and Cross, is the main focus of overrepresentation in IDEA 2004. While research has focused upon the difficulties of

identifying the root causes of racial disproportionality (Donovan & Cross; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Knotek, 2003; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002; Overton, Fielding, & Simonsson, 2004; Rogers, 2002; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Coudrado, & Chung, 2008; Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson, & Kushner, 2006), there is a need to examine practices which have resulted in reducing overrepresentation in special education once the evaluation process has begun.

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

This study centered on Organizational Learning Theory and authentic dialogue as tools to examine district practices resulting in the reduction of overrepresentation in special education. Both Organizational Learning Theory and authentic dialogue provide insight into how organizations construct and disseminate knowledge to individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole that result in a change in practices (Fauske & Raybould, 2005; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008).

Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational Learning Theory (OLT) consists of loosely organized models of learning designed to explain organizational learning in relation to human learning (Knapp, 2008). OLT emphasizes both the structural-technical and the social-cognitive aspects of learning (Fauske & Raybould, 2005). The structural-technical aspect focuses upon process and procedures, flow of information, goal setting, and roles and responsibilities (Fauske & Raybould) while the social-cognitive perspective of learning explores interactions within organizations as well as organizational culture (Fauske & Raybould; Schein, 1992; Schein, 1996).

The structural-technical perspective of learning includes single-loop learning. This type of learning is appropriate for members when learning basic routines and procedures within an organization. When the organization as a whole engages in single-loop learning, the organization simply reacts to the environment using the existing knowledge of the organization (Garvin, 1993; Senge, 1990) which may be out-of-date or inaccurate (Argyris & Schön, 1978). No new knowledge is created with this type of learning (Argyris & Schön).

The social-cognitive perspective of learning is reflected in the concepts of double-loop learning and mental models. Double loop learning focuses upon acquiring and internalizing new knowledge and disseminating this knowledge to others in the organization (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). Members within the organization engaging in double loop learning will experience a change in their beliefs, ideas, and attitudes (Eilertson & London, 2005). This learning is appropriate when members are dealing with complex issues (Eilertson & London). Organizations either replace prior knowledge with the newly created knowledge, or organizations merge the new knowledge with the prior knowledge (Scribner et al., 1999).

Mental models are “collections of memories that guide responses and are interconnected around specific experiences” (Fauske & Raybould, 2005, p. 23). Memories are activated from previous experiences in solving problems similar to the current problem. Mental models can be shared across teams within an organization and can shape how problems are solved (Schein, 1992). Shared mental models will include all the information known within the organization as a whole and will highlight what is important to the organization (Senge, 1990). Once a mental model is shared and

internalized within an organization, studying any one group within the organization will allow it to be assessed as a whole (Fauske & Raybould).

Authentic Dialogue

Authentic dialogue is a “type of dialogue that encourages the detection and correction of errors, encourages participants to be reflective and self-aware, to be open, honest and balanced in their accounts, to continually monitor their expressions so that they are congruent with their values and beliefs and to communicate these values transparently” (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008, p. 442). Authentic dialogue allows for double loop learning (Mazutis & Slawinski) where procedures, practices, and values and beliefs can be discussed, questioned, and changed. Discussing and confronting conflict through “balanced, open and transparent communications between the individual and group levels and then the group and organizational levels” (Mazutis & Slawinski, p. 447) is possible through authentic dialogue. This result of this dialogue would be the construction of new organizational knowledge. Constructing knowledge in education is a social endeavor involving conversations with others in the organization (Bruffee, 1999). As a result of knowledge creation through conversation, better decisions can be made (Bruffee).

Statement of the Problem

Students who have been determined to have met eligibility criteria for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability tend to be educated in restrictive placements that are often permanent (Cartledge, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Rueda, Klingner, Sager, & Velasco, 2008; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Once in these restrictive placements, students tend to be provided with limited access to general education experience, the least experienced teachers, and substandard curriculum (Ferri & Connor; Rueda et al.). These

restrictive placements can result in low graduation rates and minimal opportunities for post-secondary success (US DOE, 2009). In fact, “although it is the intention of special education programs to meet the needs of students with disabilities and help them achieve to their potential, there is consensus in both general and special education that general education programs are ultimately the least restrictive environment in which students can obtain the greatest access to high expectations and challenging curriculum, without labels” (Rueda et al., 2008, p. 142). While any student in restrictive placements may have limited opportunities, Black students inappropriately identified as being disabled are least likely to be educated in a regular class for most of the day while White students are more likely to be educated in the regular education environment (US DOE, 2009).

A consequence to students not being education in regular class is that they may be at risk for graduating. Since the 1995 school year, students labeled with mental retardation/intellectual disability have had the second lowest graduation rates, and students with emotional disturbance have had the highest dropout rates (US DOE). Additionally, in 2004 39.1% of Black students with disabilities graduated, which is the lowest graduation rate (US DOE). While special education programs are intended to meet the needs of students with disabilities in order to allow them to reach their full potential, the least restrictive environment for students appears to be general education where expectations are set high and the curriculum is challenging (Rueda et al 2008.). Identifying and examining practices that may reduce the overrepresentation of Black students in special education is essential to providing greater opportunities for participation in the regular education environment in schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. The practices of a single Missouri school district, which previously had been identified as being racially disproportionate, were studied. The district studied had been designated beginning in 2007 by the DESE as having a disproportionate number of Black students in the eligibility category of Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability based upon data from the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. The district studied was determined no longer disproportionate by DESE in 2010.

The study was designed to assist districts currently identified as being disproportionate. District practices will be examined that may have attributed to reducing the over identification of Black students in special education in a district which is no longer identified as being disproportionate. This study will add to the body of knowledge regarding practices which may reduce overrepresentation in similar school districts.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. The literature revealed the complexity of determining the causes of inappropriate identification of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Klingner

& Harry, 2006; Knotek, 2003; O'Connor and Fernandez, 2006; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002; Overton, Fielding, & Simonsson, 2004; Rogers, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wilkinson, et al., 2006) and a lack of research in practices to reduce inappropriate identification after a student has been evaluated. This study examined the learning processes and dissemination of knowledge and its impact on reducing overrepresentation in a Missouri school district. The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. Which practices did the district engage in that addressed reduced racial disproportionality?
2. How were practices related to racial disproportionality and reducing overrepresentation disseminated to district staff?
3. How are race and racial disproportionality discussed?
4. What impact has dialogue related to racial disproportionality had on organizational learning?
5. How does dialogue inform practices that reduce the over identification of minority students in special education?

Limitations and Assumptions

Despite all efforts to ensure trustworthiness, limitations exist in any research design. The following limitations and assumptions were acknowledged in this study. Utilizing the researcher as instruments creates opportunities for the researcher to make mistakes and allow personal biases to appear in the study (Merriam, 1998). The data collected was limited to a single school district in Missouri although the purpose of qualitative research is to interpret events and not to generalize finding (Merriam). The

researcher presumed the research subjects were forthright as the questions related to a sensitive topic—dialogue and learning process related to race and racial disproportionality. Also, the researcher assumed participants answered questions in relation to their own experiences in the school district. In addition, the researcher relied on participant memory that can be marred by the passage of time although the focus of questions was primarily related to current practices in the district. Although based upon information gleaned through analyzing previous research, the protocol was designed by the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher assumed the participants understood the interview questions.

Design Controls

To ensure trustworthiness of data collection and analysis, various methods were utilized to be certain of the rigor of the research. Data were triangulated, “using multiple investigators, sources of data, or methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 24). The rich, thick data gleaned from data collection and triangulation allowed the researcher and the readers of the research to determine whether findings can be transferred to other similar situations (Merriam). An audit trail was preserved of this rich, thick data, so fellow researchers can determine how data were collected, categorized, and used in the study (Merriam). This audit trail can then be used by fellow researchers to determine if they would conclude the same findings.

Definition of Key Terms

The following commonly used terms were defined to enhance understanding of this inquiry:

Child with a disability: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines students with disabilities as those children, ages three (3) to twenty-one (21), who have been properly evaluated as having Mental Retardation, Hearing Impairments and Deafness, Speech or Language Impairments, Visual Impairments including Blindness, Emotional Disturbance, Orthopedic Impairments, Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, Other Health Impaired, a Specific Learning Disability, Deaf Blindness, or Multiple Disabilities and, who because of that disability, require special education and related services. As allowed under 34 CFR 300.87 implementing IDEA, the State of Missouri also defines a child with a disability to include ages three (3) through five (5) who have been properly identified as a young child with a developmental delay (MO DESE, 2007, p. 2).

Free appropriate public education (FAPE): Special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge (OSERS, 2006).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised at least annually (OSERS, 2006).

IEP team: Group of specified individuals that is responsible for developing, reviewing, or revising an IEP for a child with a disability (OSERS, 2006).

Least restrictive environment: To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability

of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (OSERS, 2006).

Local education agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary school or secondary schools (OSERS, 2006).

Minority students: Minority people have been traditionally defined for what they are not (i.e., non-White) (Artiles, 1998).

Participation: The term participation means the act of taking part or having a share or part in something (Merriam-Webster, 2003).

Racial disproportionality: The extent to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, N., 1999).

Special education: Specially designed instruction provided, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and instruction in physical education (MO DESE, 2007, p. 10).

Summary

Black students are “overrepresented in the categories of mental retardation (MR) and emotional disturbance (ED)” (Hosp & Reschly, 2004, p. 186). Students determined

meeting eligibility criteria for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability tend to be educated in restrictive placements. These placements are often permanent with limited access to general education experiences (Cartledge, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Rueda et al., 2008; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). While research has focused upon the difficulties of identifying the root causes of racial disproportionality (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Knotek, 2003; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002; Overton, Fielding, & Simonsson, 2004; Rogers, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wilkinson et al., 2006), there is a need to examine practices which have resulted in reducing overrepresentation in special education once the evaluation process has begun.

A review of the current literature related to the study is included in Chapter Two. Discussed in Chapter Three is a description of the research design and methodology. The rationale for selecting the design of the study, a case study, is also described. Presentation of the data findings and analysis of these findings are presented in Chapter Four. Findings, conclusions, implications for practice along with recommendations for future research are described in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The dialogue of district staff will be studied through the theory of organizational learning to examine the problem of racial disproportionality in special education. Organizational Learning Theory (OLT) will be used as a lens to view school district activities, practices, and procedures to gain richer meaning in relationship to racial disproportionality in special education. Since organizations learn through the sharing of mental models that influence individual and team decisions (Schein, 1993), these mental models will be explored by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. While staff members will not have identical experiences, each member has access to the shared knowledge and memories of the larger organization.

Presented in this chapter is a review of related literature key to the examination of learning processes and dialogue in special education and its influence on racial disproportionality. The conceptual underpinnings of organizational learning theory and authentic dialogue will be applied to racial disproportionality in special education.

Racial Disproportionality in Special Education

In recent years, the federal government led by President Bush solidified standards for all students. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush, in January 2002, with the goal of ensuring that every single student reach his or her full potential as measured by one national standard for all. Mandates require disaggregated data to ensure all subgroups meet performance standards, which

can help find inequity and determine the causes of it in a school (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). In addition, President Bush's Executive Order 13227 (2001) the previous October had created the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education in order to determine ways in which children with disabilities could also reach the standard that would be established with NCLB (President's Commission, 2002).

NCLB and the President's Commission report both influenced lawmakers drafting the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (IDEA, 2004; Yell, 2006).

As a result, both NCLB and IDEA 2004 have put emphasis on the analysis of school data in determining disproportionality (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). Increased attention has been given to disproportionality, which may be due to the fact that both the 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations of IDEA placed a larger emphasis on the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010).

Concern has been expressed since the 1960s regarding racial disproportionality in special education (Artiles et al., 2004; Dunn, 1968; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). In 1968, Dunn identified the problem of racial disproportionality in students labeled mildly mentally retarded/intellectually disabled. Since that time, Congress has twice commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to study the issue of racial disproportionality in special education—once in 1982 and again in 2002. During the 20 years between studies, racial disproportionality was found to have persisted (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The 28th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (US Department of Education, 2009) reported Black, not Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native students are 1.5 times as likely to be labeled with a disability as all

other racial groups put together. Alarming, Black students are three times more likely to be labeled mentally retarded/intellectually disabled and 2.3 times more likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed than all other racial groups combined (Parrish, 2002).

Defining and Calculating Racial Disproportionality

The literature (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Coutinho et al., 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Klingner, et al., 2005; Oswald, et al., 1999; Paul, et al., 2001) has established the existence of racial disproportionality in special education. Williams (2007) reported racial disproportionality exists when the number of students' enrolled in particular racial groups in special education program exceeds or is markedly less than the number of students enrolled in the general population of students.

Initially, IDEA 1997 mandated that States analyze their special education student count data for disproportionality, which was limited to identification and placement data. IDEA 2004 made changes in how states and LEAs must address disproportionality in special education. Additionally, IDEA 2004 required districts to analyze disproportionality in suspension and expulsion rates as well. If significant disproportionality is found then States must require LEAs to reserve the maximum amount of funds to provide comprehensive, coordinated, early intervening services to students in the LEA, particularly students in groups that are significantly overidentified, and to report publicly on the revision of policies, procedures, and practices used in identification and placement (IDEA, 2004). IDEA requires districts with significant racial disproportionality to allocate 15% of their special education funds to early intervening services (Gibb & Skiba, 2008).

Furthermore, IDEA 2004 allowed each state to define the term significant disproportionality. Consequently, a national standard was not set as IDEA requires each

state to consider factors, such as population size, the size of each local school district, and the racial composition of each state's population to determine what may be statistically significant disproportionality for that particular state (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2006). In addition, each state defines the eligibility categories for special education. This variance in eligibility criteria affects the procedures used to identify students as disabled. Furthermore, this variance can be linked to racial disproportionality (Harry & Klingner, 2006). IDEA does, however, require states to determine significant disproportionality by collecting and analyzing data rather than analyzing a district's policies, procedures, and/or practices (Special Education and Rehabilitative Services). More than an examination of data, monitoring indicators focuses not only upon significant disproportionality but also upon disproportionate representation that is the result of inappropriate identification (IDEA, 2004). Since the focus is upon inappropriate identification in specific disability categories, disproportionality resulting from inappropriate educational placement is not a monitoring priority area (IDEA, 2004; Office of the Federal Register, 2006).

Calculating disproportionality is closely related to defining disproportionality. However, no method for calculating disproportionality is agreed upon (Klingner et al., 2005), which highlights the difficulty of standardizing disproportionality amongst states. IDEA does require each state to identify how disproportionality in special education will be calculated. This information is required to be included in each state's performance plan which is submitted to the United States Department of Education.

Gibb and Skiba (2008) argued that having clear and accurate data is the first step in understanding racial disproportionality. To this end, the three most widely-used ways

of calculating disproportionality in schools are the composition index, the risk index, and the risk ratio (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Gibb & Skiba). The composition index involves dividing the total number of students in a racial group in a particular disability category by the total number of students, regardless of race, in the same disability category (Gibb & Skiba; Klingner et al., 2005). This calculation provides the percentage of students in a particular disability category represented by a given racial group. The risk index is calculated by dividing the number of students in a racial group in a particular disability category by the total number of students in the racial group in the district. This calculation yields the percentage of a particular racial group served in a specific disability category (Gibb & Skiba; Klingner et al.). To calculate the risk ratio, the risk index of one racial group is divided by the risk index of another racial group (Bollmer, Bethel, Garrison-Mogren, & Brauen, 2007; Gibb & Skiba; Klingner et al.). This calculation provides a comparison of risk of different racial groups. Overall, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) prefers the risk ratio method. White student risk ratios are often used as the denominator in literature (Donovan & Cross; Klingner et al., 2005), while the overrepresentation of Black students is increasing.

Since the 2007-2008 school year, the risk ratio method has been used to determine which Missouri school districts have disproportionate representation and significant disproportionality (MO DESE, 2011c). Disproportionate representation in the area of Identification is identified when a district has a risk ratio of 2.5 or greater for overrepresentation and less than 2.5 for under representation (MO DESE, 2011c). Significant disproportionality in the area of Identification is defined as a district having a risk ratio greater than 3.5 for three consecutive years (MO DESE, 2011c). Each racial and

disability group being reviewed, including the comparison group, must have at least thirty students (MO DESE, 2011c).

Overrepresentation of Black Students Labeled Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled and Emotionally Disturbed

The eligibility categories of mental retardation/intellectual disability and emotional disturbance are of specific concern considering the seriousness of these disabilities and the fact that special education placements in these categories are often the most restrictive (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). All of the Office of Civil Rights surveys completed report Black students overrepresented in the categories of mental retardation/intellectual disability and emotional disturbance (Hosp & Reschly, 2004). And since 1998, the OSEP has gathered data regarding overrepresentation as well (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschley).

The results revealed that Black students are served in greater proportions in special education than all other students (President's Commission, 2002). In particular, Black elementary and middle school students are more likely to be labeled as mentally retarded/intellectually disabled and emotionally disturbed than any other category (President's Commission). According the US Department of Education (US DOE, 2009), Black students were 2.83 times more likely to receive special education and related services under the mental retardation/intellectual disability category than all other groups and 2.24 times more likely under the emotional disturbance eligibility category.

Moreover, special education placements for students identified as mentally retarded/intellectually disabled and emotionally disturbed are usually provided in segregated classrooms that are restrictive and permanent in nature (Cartledge, 2005; Ferri

& Connor, 2005; Rueda et al., 2008). While in these placements, Black students have limited access to inclusive and general educational environments, experience higher dropout rates and lower academic performance, and are exposed to substandard and less rigorous curricula (Ferri & Connor). Data from a Department of Education report indicated Black students with disabilities were least likely to be educated in a regular class for most of the day while White students were more likely to be educated in the regular education environment (US DOE, 2009). In fact, since the 1995 school year, students with mental retardation/intellectual disability have had the second lowest graduation rates, and students with emotional disturbance have had the highest dropout rates (US DOE). Additionally, in 2004, 39.1% of Black students with disabilities graduated which is the lowest graduation rate of all races (US DOE). While special education programs are intended to meet the needs of students with disabilities in order to allow them to reach their full potential, the least restrictive environment for students appears to be general education where expectations are set high and the curriculum is challenging (Rueda et al.).

Causes of Racial Disproportionality

While the causes of racial disproportionality are not totally clear in the literature, some researchers point to sociodemographic factors other than race alone as the culprit (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Coutinho et al., 2002), while others have found general education teaching practices to be racially biased (Artiles, et al., 2002; Cartledge, 2005; Klingner et al., 2005) and a lack of ethics training for education professionals (Paul et al., 2001) to contribute to racial disproportionality. However, found in the literature are two dominating categories: school factors and student and family factors.

School Factors

Donovon and Cross (2002) noted that racial disproportionality in special education is the result of problems within both special and regular education. They identified the school factors contributing to racial disproportionality in special education. These school factors included failure of general education to educate students from diverse backgrounds, inappropriate referrals for special education, lack of access to effective instruction, and misidentification of students as disabled by educational professionals.

Consequently, studies have found that schools with predominately White students and White teachers have a disproportionate amount of minority students in special education (Coutinho, et al., 2002). Teachers tend to refer students to special education who learn or behave differently than their White, middle class peers (Coutinho et al.). Artiles, Klingner, and Tate (2006) posited that traditional definitions of difference such as gender and ethnicity are complicated by additional layers of difference, like language proficiency and ability level. These layers of difference make it difficult for educators to determine the root cause of a student's academic or behavioral difficulties.

Further complicating issues of difference is the notion that educators are not currently engaged in finding solutions to the problem of racial disproportionality (Cartledge, 2005). Rather educators (both general and special education) will compromise professional ethics to participate in racially biased eligibility practices if they believe special education is the only way to help a student (Coutinho et al., 2002). In fact, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) found students were referred to special education even though teachers knew school failure was

not related to an actual disability. Since referrals to special education tend to be made by general educators, the literature has focused upon general education and prereferral strategies as a possible cause of racial disproportionality (Artiles et al., 2002; Cartledge).

In addition, educators are uncomfortable discussing issues related to race (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, & Wu, 2006). In fact, teachers are more apt to explain poor student outcomes on student factors like lack of sleep and lack of parent support than on possible difference in how students learn and behave from different racial groups (Skiba et al., 2006). Oswald, Coutinho, and Best (2002) reported Black students are more likely than Whites to be labeled mentally retarded/intellectually disabled. In fact, Whites tended to be labeled learning disabled by multidisciplinary teams of professionals instead of mentally retarded/intellectually disabled even though the profiles of the students were comparable (Oswald et al.).

Generally, students are referred to special education primarily due to academic (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004) and behavior problems (Donovan & Cross). Coupling that issue with the notion that Black and Latino students “perform significantly lower than White students in reading, writing, and math and science” (Hosp & Reschly, p. 187), results in the likelihood a disproportionate number of Black and Latino students qualify for special education is significant. Moreover, Hosp and Reschly found achievement difficulties and racial disproportionality are related although they did not find achievement difficulties cause racial disproportionality. Additionally, Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz and Chung (2005) established suspension and expulsion rates consistently predicted special education disproportionality in districts. In addition, educators who have less expertise and who are less well prepared are often

assigned to teach students from diverse backgrounds (Skiba et al., 2008), which can further contribute to achievement and behavior difficulties throughout the education of diverse student populations.

Once academic achievement and/or behavioral problems have been identified by general education, the next step in the special education process involves the evaluation of the student to determine eligibility for special education services (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The misidentification of minority students (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004) as disabled involves both general and special education professionals who are members of teams that determine assessment procedures and special education eligibility.

One method of misidentification found in the literature (Oswald et al., 1999) involved assessment instruments themselves. Instruments used in referral, assessment, and eligibility processes have been found to be culturally and linguistically biased. As a result, these assessments may measure and interpret the ability, achievement, and behavior of students differently across ethnic groups (Oswald et al.).

Another method of misidentification which may contribute racial disproportionality is the use of professional judgment by multidisciplinary teams (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Racial disproportionality appears to be a concern in judgmental but not nonjudgmental categories of special education (Donovan & Cross; Klingner et al., 2005; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). Nonjudgmental categories include low incidence categories with clear medical or physical cause which requires "limited inference on the part of professionals" (O'Connor & Fernandez, p. 6). In many of these

cases, students have been identified prior to attending school by medical professionals (Klingner et al.).

O'Connor and Fernandez (2006) argued judgmental categories, on the other hand, “capture subtle disabilities for which there is usually no known organic cause and for which diagnosis rests on the ‘art’ of professional judgment” (p. 6). This ‘art’ of professional judgment is typically rendered by school personnel rather than medical professionals and occurs after a student has failed at school (Klingner et al., 2005). These judgmental categories include mild mental retardation/intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, and learning disability. In these judgmental categories, students do not usually exhibit outward deficits but rather are considered to have internal deficits affecting their learning and/or behavior (Klingner et al.).

Judgmental categories of disability also have exclusionary clauses for multidisciplinary teams to consider in regards to environmental and cultural factors. However, there are various ways to interpret “definitions, criteria, and exclusionary clauses” (Overton, Fielding, & Simonsson, 2004, p. 321). In fact, no clear way to define the exclusions of environmental and cultural factors has been provided by IDEA (Overton et al.). Without clear definitions, multidisciplinary teams may not discuss these exclusionary factors at all especially in light of literature which indicates educators themselves are uncomfortable discussing difference (Artiles et al., 2006). Furthermore, multidisciplinary teams may experience other pressures from administration about obtaining help for failing students regardless of whether a student meets eligibility criteria for disability under IDEA (Overton et al.).

Studies (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Knotek, 2003) have examined multidisciplinary teams' decisions (such as school psychologists and educators), their practices, and their perceptions about families that affect eligibility decision making. Klingner and Harry (2006) conducted an ethnographic study to examine how CST members decided special education placement for English Language Learners. According to Klingner and Harry, school professionals struggled to differentiate language acquisition from the categorical eligibility of Specific Learning Disability.

Knotek (2003) conducted an ethnographic study to examine two multidisciplinary teams in rural Carolina in which the problem solving process was more subjective when students were from either low socioeconomic status or presented behavior problems. In fact, the multidisciplinary teams focused upon the problems with the student rather than the original reason for referral. Earlier, Rogers (2002) conducted a two year ethnographic study, using discourse analysis to examine two special education eligibility meetings for an adolescent female identified for speech/language impairment services and multiple disabilities. Rogers found a clear contrast between the two meetings. Wilkinson, et al. (2006) evaluated the appropriateness of eligibility decisions that led to English language learner placement in learning disability programs for reading related problems. Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) examined odds ratio data to evaluate eligibility decision making.

Student and Family Factors

Student and family factors which may contribute to racial disproportionality in special education include intrinsic deficits as well as difference and poverty. The National Research Council (Donovan & Cross, 2002) found factors inherent within children have been used to determine disability. In fact, educators have found it “quite

difficult to distinguish internal child traits that require the ongoing support of special education from inadequate opportunity or contextual support for learning and behavior” (Donovan & Cross, p. 3). O’Connor and Fernandez (2006) held that schools determine who is disabled rather than the disability being inherent in certain children. Additionally, Klingner et al. (2005) reported disability is not inherent in culturally and linguistically diverse students. Artiles (1998) indicated research into the assumed differences of minority students should be explored to determine underlying reasons for disproportionality especially as Connor and Ferri (2005) reported teacher perceptions of racial minority groups has historically resulted in misunderstanding.

Skiba et al. (2006) postulated educators are unprepared to instruct students in poverty. Since Black students are already overrepresented in low socioeconomic status and behavioral referrals that may contribute to the overrepresentation of Black students in special education. While the National Research Council report (Donovan & Cross, 2002) indicated poverty increased the likelihood for the need of special education services; however, other research has shown poverty is a weak predictor of racial disproportionality (Oswald et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2005). The National Research Council also indicated poverty in and of itself does not necessarily result in decreased potential for learning in school (Donovan & Cross).

O’Connor and Fernandez (2006) challenged the National Research Council report (Donovan & Cross, 2002) which they claimed supported the theory they labeled the Theory of Compromised Human Development (TCHD). O’Connor and Fernandez summarized this theory as follows:

- (1) Minorities are more likely to be poor,

- (2) 'Being' poor increases exposure to risk factors that compromise early development,
- (3) Compromised early development impinges on school preparedness and suppresses academic achievement, heightening the need for special education, and
- (4) Thus, minorities are more likely to warrant special education (O'Connor & Fernandez, p. 7).

O'Connor and Fernandez argued this theory "under-analyzes how the culture and organization of schools constrain the achievement of minority students and pathologizes their bodies and behaviors such that they are more likely to be referred for and subsequently placed in special education" (p. 9). Poverty theory, however, fails to explain why racial disproportionality is mostly found in mental retardation/intellectual disability and emotional disturbance categories and why Hispanics are far less likely to be identified in those two eligibility categories despite the fact Blacks and Hispanics share a similar risk for poverty (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Interestingly, Oswald et al. (2002) found Black students were more likely labeled mentally retarded/intellectually disabled if they were from wealthier communities. Eitle (2002) found districts with higher levels of poverty amongst Whites had lower levels of Black students in MR categories, which he indicated may be due to Whites wanting to use those resources for themselves. However, Eitle also reported districts with very high levels of White poverty had more Black students in MR programs, which he posited may be related to racism.

Hosp and Reschly (2004) articulated that further information is needed regarding the variables associated with racial disproportionality before interventions can be put into place to remedy overrepresentation. This is especially true since different factors have

been proposed that may contribute to racial disproportionality which has led to different recommendations to solving this problem (Rueda et al., 2008). In special education, decisions are made in multidisciplinary teams. These multidisciplinary teams should consider and discuss school as well as student and family factors when determining eligibility for special education. IDEA (2004) has challenged districts to reform their practices as it relates to racial disproportionality in special education. Through multidisciplinary team discussion of school as well as student and family factors affecting students, the multidisciplinary team must learn new skills and new ways of working with an increasingly diverse population of students while school organizations must learn to manage tensions that may arise from reform (Knapp, 2008).

Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational Learning Theory (OLT) consists of loosely organized models of learning designed to explain organizational learning in relation to human learning (Knapp, 2008). Organizational learning is a “process of change and reconciliation of differences that requires individuals to be open to feedback” (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008, p. 448). OLT focuses upon improving organizational memory and increasing the base of organizational knowledge (Argyris & Schön, 1978). In this way, OLT “can offer deep, detailed understandings of districts as learning systems” (Knapp, 2008, p. 524). Organizational learning is both a feed-forward process and a feedback process (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999). As a feed-forward process, individual learning impacts group and whole organizational learning while, as a feedback process, organizational learning impacts group and individual learning (Crossan et al.).

OLT reflects an emphasis on both the structural-technical and the social-cognitive aspects of learning (Fauske & Raybould, 2005). The structural-technical aspect focuses upon the functional aspects of an organization, such as the process and procedures, flow of information, goal setting, and roles and responsibilities (Fauske & Raybould). In the field of special education, this type of learning would relate to the process and procedures of compliance standards with federal and state laws and IEP and evaluation paperwork.

Single-loop learning utilizes a structural-technical approach to organizational learning which focuses primarily upon the actions of individuals (Argyris & Schön, 1978). In this type of learning, individuals accept organizational rules and seek to improve their performance within the organization. When a desired outcome is not reached through an initial action, the individual may change their action without questioning organizational rules or assumptions (Argyris & Schön). Those engaged in single-loop learning often ask questions about *how* to complete a task rather than ask questions about *why* a task should be completed; as a result, the individual may change their actions to achieve a desired outcome without understanding completely the task itself (Argyris & Schön). This type of learning has an important place in an organization and is appropriate for individuals when learning routines and procedures within an organization. Learning in an organization is often described by researchers as a response to conditions outside of the organization which, in turn, changes the collective thinking and behavior of the organization (Knapp, 2008). When the organization as a whole engages in single-loop learning, the organization simply reacts to the environment using the existing knowledge of the organization (Garvin, 1993; Senge, 1990). This is problematic as the organization may be using knowledge that is out-of-date and/or

inaccurate since new knowledge is not being created with this type of learning (Argyris & Schön).

The social-cognitive perspective of learning explores interactions within organizations as well as organizational culture (Fauske & Raybould, 2005; Schein, 1992; Schein, 1996). Within the social-cognitive aspect the context and the relationships of organizations to the environments in which they function has been explored (Fauske & Raybould; Weick, 1995) as well as the relationships amongst individuals within the organization (Fauske & Raybould).

Double-loop learning reflects the social-cognitive perspectives of learning. Double-loop learning requires organizations, such as schools, to question current routines, procedures, and the values in which routines and procedures were adopted originally (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Scribner, et al. (1999) defined double-loop learning as “a process that examines the underlying assumptions and leads, not only to the acquisition and integration of new knowledge, but to the effective use and dissemination of professional knowledge” (p. 155). In double-loop learning, members experience a change in their beliefs, ideas, and attitudes (Eilertson & London, 2005). This type of learning is appropriate in an organization when members are dealing with “complex, nonprogrammable issues” (Eilertson & London, p. 3). In fact, double-loop learning involves reflective learning where members ask *why* to gain insight in order to understand and gain knowledge within the organization. Organizations either replace prior knowledge with the newly created knowledge, or organizations merge the new knowledge with the prior knowledge (Scribner et al., 1999). In order to engage in double-loop learning, members must be able to recognize the “underlying patterns of their

thinking and behavior” (Eilertson & London, p. 3) and must be committed to learning (Garvin, 1993). Double-loop learning is problematic if individuals engage in behaviors to defend their actions (Argyris & Schön). In fact, rather than studying the actions to determine corrective action, individuals may alter the information shared (Argyris & Schön) which can result in the organization learning and making decisions with incorrect or incomplete information.

As a social-cognitive aspect of OLT, mental models are “collections of memories that guide responses and are interconnected around specific experiences” (Fauske & Raybould, 2005, p. 23). Memories are activated from previous experiences in solving problems similar to the current problem. The memories that are activated can include knowledge, emotions, beliefs, and values.

A benefit to mental models is that they can be shared across groups within an organization and can shape how other individuals solve problems or how the organization as a whole solves problems (Schein, 1992). Shared mental models will include all the information known within the organization as a whole and will highlight what is important to the organization (Senge, 1990). In turn, studying any one group within an organization will allow the organization to be assessed as a whole (Fauske & Raybould, 2005). Mental models also reveal an individual’s theory in use which may be different from an individual’s espoused theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Recognizing the differences between an individual’s theory in use and espoused theory is necessary for deeper learning (Senge).

Knowledge Creation and Learning in Teams

Several researchers have investigated and outlined various aspects of how individuals, teams, and organizations learn and create knowledge (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bruffee, 1999; Nonaka, 1991; Eraut, 2004; Fauske & Raybould, 2005). An organization learns through the learning of the individual members within the organization (Argyris & Schön; Fauske & Raybould; Schein, 1996). In fact, individuals often “master lessons their system cannot” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 28). The various school staff involved in identification of students with disabilities will learn from each situation. Eraut explored three types of informal learning individuals may engage in the workplace, which can in turn create new knowledge for the organization: implicit learning, reactive learning, and deliberative learning. Implicit learning involves the unplanned acquisition of knowledge without the benefit of explicit knowledge. Reactive learning is intentional learning which occurs spontaneously with little time to think or plan while deliberative learning is also intentional learning but with a specific goal in mind, whether it is planning or problem solving (Eraut). Eraut further indicated in learning, individuals may explain that they learned from a single incident or from accumulated incidents.

While individual learning is an important part of organizational learning theory, its relationship to team learning is also critical to understand. In fact, teaming is the key to learning within organizations. Learning in teams is referred to in literature as collective learning (Fauske & Raybould, 2005). While the term collective learning conjures images of teams working together in harmony, collective learning experiences barriers as well. More specifically, transferring knowledge from the individual to the team to the

organization as a whole is difficult if organizational norms could prevent the distribution of information to different levels (Argyris & Schön, 1978). For example, some organizations are focused upon the structural-technical aspects of learning, which highlights process and procedures and the flow of information through a hierarchy (Fauske & Raybould). However, organizational learning is more than the flow of information through a hierarchy; it focuses upon how individuals, teams, and the organization itself learn from one another (Fauske & Raybould).

Nonaka (1991) posited knowledge creation “depends on tapping the tacit and often highly subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches of individual employees and making those insights available for testing and use by the company as a whole” (p. 97). By design special education decision making is not made by one individual, as one individual would not possess all of the knowledge necessary to design an appropriate educational program for a student. In turn, such an individual cannot create knowledge by him- or herself. Eraut (2004) posited four main types of activities at work in which learning takes place: participating in group activities, working alongside others, tackling challenging tasks, and working with clients (p. 266-267). High levels of learning in the workplace depend upon the quality of relationships within the group or team (Eraut).

Bruffee (1999) argued constructing knowledge in education is a social endeavor involving conversations with others in the team. As a result of this knowledge creation through conversations, better decisions can be made in teams (Bruffee). And, in order to work together to create knowledge, teams must have a degree of trust amongst one another (Sebring, Hallman, & Smylie, 2003). Working together requires a degree of relational trust necessary for successful interdependence (Sebring et al.).

This relational trust “depends on the synchrony of the expectations people hold of each other regarding their role obligations” (Sebring et al., 2003, p. 10). Relational trust does not apply to just a single leader but rather to each individual within the team in order to function as a whole. Members of the company, or team, must be personally committed to the group in order to be motivated to share their deeply personal, tacit knowledge for the greater good of the team (Nonaka, 1991).

Spiral of Knowledge

Nonaka (1991) coined the term spiral of knowledge to describe the process by which personal knowledge becomes group knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) posited this knowledge creating process consisting of four modes of knowledge conversion: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization.

Socialization involves the sharing of personal, tacit knowledge directly with another person (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi described tacit knowledge as difficult to explain since knowledge is created from individual experience. While the skill may be learned by another member of the team, this, in and of itself, does not benefit the entire team as it becomes individual knowledge created through the next member’s experience. Crossan et al. (1999) refers to this process of connecting learning with an individual’s own experiences as intuiting.

Externalization occurs when a member of the team creates metaphors and analogies as he or she attempts to explain and interpret their tacit knowledge to others (Crossan et al., 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) in order to determine a course of action or check the accuracy of personal knowledge with other members of the team (Eraut, 2004). Eraut defined personal knowledge as “what individuals bring to situations that

enables them to think, interact and perform” (p. 263). This tacit to explicit knowledge creation requires the articulation of tacit knowledge with the team. Through this process, the team integrates tacit knowledge from a variety of members and develops a common language and shared meaning for the team (Crossan et al.). The ability to articulate personal knowledge to another person or persons is essential in creating knowledge within a team and builds redundancy of knowledge into the team. In fact, Bruffee (1999) further explained, “Education initiates us into conversation, and by virtue of that conversation initiates us into thought” (p. 133). This redundancy allows for rapid sharing of information to others in the group and encourages communication, aiding in internalization of knowledge. In this step, dialogue is the key to creating shared meaning (Crossan et al.; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008)

The combination phase of knowledge creation requires the combining of explicit knowledge from various sources (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Explicit to explicit knowledge creation includes a member of the group synthesizing the information from different sources within the group; however, this step alone does not create new knowledge for the company or team. Explicit knowledge tends to be knowledge that is written down which is then fairly easy for other members of the team to learn (Nonaka & Takeuchi). As this explicit knowledge is discussed and refined, the group creates knowledge that is commonly shared by the new community of knowledge (Bruffee, 1999). This combination of knowledge involves the reacculturation of individuals into a new knowledge community created through conversation (Bruffee).

Internalization involves sharing the newly created knowledge from individuals to the entire team and to other teams within the organization, or school, as a whole through

conversation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The ability to internalize explicit knowledge through conversation in order to further personal knowledge completes the spiral of knowledge as explicit to tacit knowledge creation is experienced when new knowledge is shared with the team and then individual members of the team internalize the knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi).

Organizational Learning through Dialogue

During this process of sharing and internalizing knowledge, team members “confront and come to terms with ...differences between their own fixed beliefs and the contradicting fixed beliefs of their peers” (Bruffee, 1999, p. 17). In fact, group members engage in what Bruffee referred to as nonstandard discourse. In order to engage in these types of conversation, group members must have “the willingness to grant authority to peers, courage to accept the authority granted to oneself by peers and skill in the craft of interdependence” (Bruffee, p. 12). The coordination of individual actions in and amongst teams is achieved through social interactions as “interaction is the medium through which resources are deployed and influence exerted” (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, p. 236). This consensus building shapes how individuals internalize team knowledge. Once individuals have internalized knowledge, the spiral of knowledge begins again.

Many scholars would elaborate that organizational learning theory has placed an emphasis on individual, team, and organizational learning through dialogue (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bruffee, 1999; Eraut, 2004; Fauske & Raybould, 2005; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008; Nonaka, 1991). Dialogue is needed for individuals and teams to exchange ideas and learn from one another in order to create a shared understanding within the team and the organization as a whole (Mazutis & Slawinski,). Dialogue is

more than simply having a conversation about what individuals have learned from one another. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) posited, “Dialogue focuses more on inquiry and increasing understanding and tends to more exploratory and questioning than conversation” (p.5). This exploration and questions allow for teams and organizations to develop shared meaning and mental models which can be used to make decisions (Mazutis & Slawinski).

Mazutis and Slawinski (2008) defined authentic dialogue as a “type of dialogue that encourages the detection and correction of errors, encourages participants to be reflective and self-aware, to be open, honest and balanced in their accounts, to continually monitor their expressions so that they are congruent with their values and beliefs and to communicate these values transparently” (p. 442). Authentic dialogue allows for the possibility of engaging in double loop learning (Mazutis & Slawinski) where procedures, practices, and the values and beliefs they are based upon are questioned. The encouragement of authentic dialogue allows individuals to discuss and confront conflict through “balanced, open and transparent communications between the individual and group levels and then the group and organizational levels” (Mazutis & Slawinski, p. 447). Dialogue in which exploring and questioning is encouraged results in teams which are more likely to discuss issues that are sensitive in nature with less chance of negative consequences to the discussions (Mazutis & Slawinski).

Being able to discuss issues that are sensitive in nature is invaluable when addressing issues of race in schools. Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005) found White teacher candidates were uncomfortable discussing race issues in college classrooms and posited a need for race discussion in college teacher programs in order to

provide a place where pre-service teachers could discuss questions and concerns about race issues in schools. Dialogue is especially important in highlighting inconsistencies between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008). Team members may be unaware of their own biases and may not have experienced having their ideas challenged (Argyris & Schön, 1978). This may reveal an individual's inconsistencies in beliefs regarding race and the individual's actions in particular situations (Skiba, et al., 2006; Solomon et al., 2005).

Learning and Decision Making in Teams

Teams are essential to the decision making process in special education. IDEA (2004) requires the use of teams in decision making in order to ensure that a group of knowledgeable people make individualized educational decisions. Multidisciplinary teams, consisting of school personnel, parents, and other professionals with expertise in regard to specific assessments or disability knowledge, make decisions using the results of assessments to determine if a student has a disabling condition under IDEA (Yell, 2006). Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams, consisting of a special education teacher, a general education teacher, a person who can interpret the instructional implications of the evaluation results, the student's parents, a local education agency representative, and the child, when appropriate, develop the IEP and determine appropriate placement (Yell). Both evaluation teams and IEP teams use results of assessments along with knowledge of the child to "inform the decision-making process but not determine it" (Yell, p. 253). These multidisciplinary teams are not allowed to rely only upon formulas or numbers to make decisions but must also use their professional

judgment when determining eligibility or when planning a student's educational program (Yell).

Teaming is a structure for managing coordinated activity in organizations and is an avenue for collective learning (Morgan, 2006). In special education, organizing people into teams is seen as an avenue for ensuring professionals with various areas of expertise and the parent who is an expert on their child carefully consider all relevant information when making decisions. Additionally, organizing staff members in teams is seen as an avenue for effective and enduring change (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Meyers, 2004). Heller and Firestone (1995) posited teaming is the joint performance of individuals who perform functions redundantly. Teaming provides the structure needed for planned change and deliberative learning to sustain turbulent change efforts while allowing for joint improvisation to respond to the changing environment (Heller & Firestone). However, teams must always be cautious when making decisions as cause and effect are difficult to see in complex organizations, such as schools (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Sometimes teams make decisions regarding short term solutions which may not yield long term gains (Bolman & Deal) and may result in only reactive learning. While teaming allows for coordinated activity and joint performance, the nature of teams themselves affect the degree to which teams can successfully work together and engage in productive decision-making (Heller & Firestone; Morgan, 2006).

Nature of Teams

In special education, group decision-making and collaboration is needed in order to “gather ideas, collect data, and develop a plan of action” (Moore, 2009, p. 18). Multidisciplinary teams make educational decisions for students, whether determining

eligibility, services, or placement. Members of the multidisciplinary team also must understand ways in which to dialogue in order to learn from one another, how decision making should be approached, and methods to problem solve as a team (Moore). Teams must also be aware ways in which teams can be affected by group size, status differentials, cohesiveness, and member diversity (Yukl, 2006).

Group Size

A benefit to learning and decision making in multidisciplinary teams is a variety of people can be gathered who collectively have a broad range of knowledge. These viewpoints can then be shared with the rest of the team, which increases the knowledge of the team (Moore, 2009), improves the mental models of the team, and, in turn, the quality of the decisions. In theory the larger the group of people, the more knowledge could be accessed by the group (Yukl, 2006). Multidisciplinary special education teams can be small or large, depending on the circumstances of each individual student. Yell (2006), however, posited the number of participants in the multidisciplinary team should be as small as possible in order to facilitate communication between all members and allow for greater parent involvement in the special education process.

Status Differentials

The perceived variance amongst the status of team members can also affect dialogue and decision making. If all perspectives of individual team members are not discussed and considered, then the preferences of certain team members may alter the overall decisions of the team (Moore, 2009). Low status members may defer decisions to high status members rather than expressing their own opinions or may be uncomfortable that their views are not representative of the group. Additionally, high status members may influence the team of decision makers by using their perceived status (Yukl, 2006).

High status members may have more perceived status due to job titles, hierarchy of leadership, or extent of knowledge (Yukl).

Low status members may be considered to be the parents who may not contribute to team decisions (Burns, 2006). Various research studies have been conducted in parent participation during IEP team decisions. Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky (1988) conducted observations about the total amount of time parents verbally participated in IEP meetings. Afterwards, researchers interviewed the parents to determine their perceptions of the IEP meeting. Vaughn et al. found that most parents spoke very little during the IEP meetings but were satisfied overall with the conference. Burns also found, “Parents might be reluctant to contribute to the IEP meeting; parents might be intimidated by the IEP Team process; or parents might be completely satisfied that all the services have been or are currently being considered” (p. 162). Therefore, the amount of parental participation in discussion may or may not reflect the level of satisfaction with the IEP process itself. Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) surveyed seventy-three parents in a large mid-western city after parents had participated in IEPs to determine parental satisfaction with the decision making process. Garriott et al. found forty-five percent of parents (n=73) surveyed believed they were treated as an equal in the decision-making process of IEP meetings. This study was evidence of improvement from earlier research of parents who were active participants in IEP meetings (Garriott et al.). Conversely, in the same study, twenty-seven percent of parents (n=73) indicated a need to participate in order to advocate for appropriate services for their children, which hints at an adversarial relationships between parents and school professionals.

One high status member of the multidisciplinary team may be the LEA representative, who is often an administrator. Team interactions, especially those of school staff members, are influenced by organizational leadership, such as an administrator (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). In fact, “the principals’ beliefs, values, educational philosophies, and interpersonal as well as management skills have a great influence on the climate and culture of a school” (Klingner et al., 2005, p. 21) and may have an effect on whether authentic dialogue can take place in the team. While many decisions in a school are made chiefly by an administrator, multidisciplinary teams should engage in shared decision making. Shared decision making empowers each individual to share the authority and responsibility of decisions (Schlechty, 2000). Sharing the decision making allows team members a tool to balance self-interests with the needs of the school (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996).

Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness involves the level of collegiality amongst members. Cohesive groups tend to have similar values and attitudes, and, therefore, agree more readily on decisions as authentic dialogue is not needed to explore differences in values (Yukl, 2006). While a group of people with similar values may tend to agree on decisions, the team may do so without considering all avenues (Yukl). People disagreeing with the majority viewpoint may be hesitant to question the viewpoint or offer other solutions (Yukl). Additionally, members may agree with a majority opinion as team decision making can take longer than decision making made by a single leader and difficulties can arise when an agreement cannot be reached by all members within the team (Yukl).

However, the quality of learning and team decisions “depends on the contribution of information and ideas by group members, the clarity of communication, the accuracy of predictions and judgments, the extent to which the discussion is focused on the problem, and the manner in which disagreement is resolved” (Yukl, 2006, p. 338). In order to facilitate quality group decisions, coordination of individual actions in and amongst teams is achieved through social interactions (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Ogawa and Bossert asserted, “Interaction is the medium through which resources are deployed and influence exerted” (p. 236). Individuals collaborate as each responds to the efforts of others through social interactions.

In order to achieve quality social interactions, members of multidisciplinary teams must communicate viewpoints openly and consider one another’s views through authentic dialogue. Walker and Singer (1993) reported both parents and school professionals had difficulty communicating in IEP meetings. They reported “both parents and teachers had difficulty asking one another questions, using assertive statements, and offering one another support” (Walker & Singer, p. 286). Zaretsky (2004) found parents to be of the opinion that their input was not valued by members of the IEP team. The findings of this research are problematic since parent support is needed to effectively target a student’s needs and develop an effective IEP (Moore, 2009). Research has found parents prefer working with school professionals who engage in high levels of professional involvement with them (Blue-Banning, et al., 2004; Romaneck, 2005). Blue-Banning et al. found families liked “professionals to ‘go the extra mile’ and to be ‘like family’ in their involvement with them” (p. 180). Romaneck reiterated that parents like “working with an educational institution with a human face” (p. 64). Despite an

education professionals' best attempts, Martin and Kozloff (1994) warned, "Apparent hostility to some professionals is likely to reflect past and present disempowering interactions with professionals rather than parents' antisocial personalities" (p. 138).

Highly cohesive groups are also problematic as team members may tend to agree without considering all possible alternatives (Yukl, 2006). Other problems can impede quality decision making. These include problems such as "member inhibition, groupthink, false consensus, hasty decisions, polarization, and lack of action planning for implementation" (Yukl, p. 338).

Member Diversity

Members diversity is the degree to which team members may vary based on personality, demographics, and specializations (Yukl, 2006). Teams that have diverse members are often less cohesive as members tend to be less accepting of those with different values than their own (Yukl). Often educators and LEA representatives who know the student from working with him or her in an educational environment may have different perspectives than the parents (Moore, 2009). In addition, teachers have knowledge regarding the general education curriculum in regard to not only standards but also how students with disabilities can access and participate in the general curriculum (Moore) while the parent will have knowledge regarding the student's home environment and personal strengths and weaknesses.

Members must be aware how teams can be affected by group size, status differentials, cohesiveness, and member diversity (Yukl, 2006). Awareness is needed in order to understand how these characteristics affect the team's ability to share and create the knowledge necessary in order to plan for individual students and to improve the

team's mental models for use in future situations. While successful knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1991) is one aspect to team decision making practice, all professionals must employ a standard of ethics (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Wesley & Buysse, 2006). Educators in special education may experience conflict between personal and professional ethics when making decisions regarding eligibility and placement.

Ethics in Decision Making

In the field of education, special education professionals have the dual roles of being advocates for students with disabilities and followers of legal mandates as set by IDEA (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001; Fiedler, 2000; Paul et al., 2001). Professional ethics are core values and beliefs that are intended to guide the behavior of professionals (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009; Wesley & Buysse, 2006). Complicating professional ethics are personal ethics each member of the profession brings to his or her profession. In fact, "schools as formal organizations experience the tension between a professional community ethic of caring for students, critical reflection, and collaboration on the one hand, and the bureaucratic necessities of hierarchy, accountability, rationality, and control, on the other" (Scribner, et al., 1999, p. 154). Educators may experience *moral dissonance* when personal values collide with legal mandates (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009). Additionally the personal values between team members may be diverse, which can also create conflict when making team decisions (Fiedler & Van Haren) but may be helpful when engaging in authentic dialogue. In fact, numerous ethical dilemmas exist in the field of special education whether related to evaluation and identification, services, placement, accommodations/modifications (Paul et al., 2001). Since the potential for ethical dilemmas is prevalent in special education, multidisciplinary team

members must make it a priority to apply professional ethical standards when making decisions.

Ethics and Special Education

Ethics “involves the cognition of one’s beliefs, and it provides a rationale for those actions” (Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009, p. 160). When faced with an ethical dilemma, special education professionals should be able to “clearly articulate the ethical principles employed in their reasoning and decision making” (Fiedler & Van Haren, p. 162). A lack of research exists regarding the knowledge level of special education professionals and ethical codes of conduct. Cobb and Horn (1989), Rock, Geiger, and Hood (1992), and Fiedler and Van Haren (2009) conducted studies regarding special education professionals knowledge of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) code of ethics and standards for professional practice. Cobb and Horn found the majority of all educators (71%) did not know a code of ethics and standards for professional practice existed for the field of education. Rock, Geiger, and Hood found that special education teachers participated in less advocacy routines than administrators although most special education teachers supported advocacy standards. Fiedler and Van Haren found special education administrators were more likely to consider applying ethical principles in practice than special education teachers. Researchers posited this may be due to the difference in job responsibilities with administrators having “greater opportunity to grapple with the consequences of this ethical principle” (Fiedler & Van Haren, p. 171).

Professional ethics in special education.

Two publications from the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) guide the field of special education: the code of ethics and the standards for professional practice

(Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009). Since 1983, the special education profession has been guided by eight principles adopted by the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC, 2008):

1. Special education professionals are committed to developing the highest educational and quality of life potential of individuals with exceptionalities.
2. Special education professionals promote and maintain a high level of competence and integrity in practicing their profession.
3. Special education professionals engage in professional activities that benefit individuals with exceptionalities, their families, other colleagues, students, or research subjects.
4. Special education professionals exercise objective professional judgment in the practice of their profession.
5. Special education professionals strive to advance their knowledge and skills regarding the education of individuals with exceptionalities.
6. Special education professionals work within the standards and policies of their profession.
7. Special education professionals seek to uphold and improve where necessary the laws, regulations, and policies governing the delivery of special education and related services and the practice of their profession.
8. Special education professionals do not condone or participate in unethical or illegal acts, nor violate professional standards adopted by the Delegate Assembly of CEC. (p. 1).

Special education professionals are expected to advocate for students while working within the professional standards and policies of special education.

In addition to CEC's code of ethics, CEC developed Standards for Professional Practice in order to guide special education professionals in their day-to-day practices (CEC, 2008). These standards are further divided into three areas: Professionals in Relation to Persons with Exceptionalities and Their Families, Professionals in Relation to Employment, and Professionals in Relation to the Profession and Other Professionals (CEC). In the section Professionals in Relation to the Profession and Other Professionals, six standards are listed which guide special education professionals as members of multidisciplinary teams:

1. Recognize and acknowledge the competencies and expertise of members representing other disciplines as well as those of members in their own disciplines.
2. Strive to develop positive attitudes among other professionals toward persons with exceptionalities, representing them with an objective regard for their possibilities and their limitations as persons in a democratic society.
3. Cooperate with other agencies involved in serving persons with exceptionalities through such activities as the planning and coordination of information exchanges, service delivery, evaluation, and training, so that duplication or loss in quality of services may not occur
4. Provide consultation and assistance, where appropriate, to both general and special educators as well as other school personnel serving persons with exceptionalities.
5. Provide consultation and assistance, where appropriate, to professionals in nonschool settings serving persons with exceptionalities.

6. Maintain effective interpersonal relations with colleagues and other professionals, helping them to develop and maintain positive and accurate perceptions about the special education profession (p.5).

These standards of professional practice as they relate to functioning as a member of a multidisciplinary team provide specific tasks special education teachers must engage in order to be a productive and responsible member of a team.

Ethics of critique, care, and justice.

Begley (1999) posited the ethics of critique, care, and justice when making decisions. The ethics of critique involves recognizing the perspectives of all team members when making decisions and to consider how decisions will affect each team member (Begley). All perspectives must be considered so no one individual has undue influence over the decision making process (Moore, 2009). Additionally, team members must ensure the needs of the student are the focus of discussion and not personal self interest (Begley). The ethics of care requires teams to focus upon the needs of the student (Begley). This focus demands careful consideration of all alternatives and the data presented in the evaluation report and/or IEP as personal preferences of the student, parents, teachers, or administration will not necessarily result in the best outcome for the student (Moore). The ethics of justice involves considering the outcomes that will best benefit all students (Begley). The rights of students with disabilities are defined in IDEA 2004 in regard to access to general education and least restrictive environment. However, consideration is also allowed regarding the extent to which the student with disabilities can and should participate in the general education environment (IDEA 2004). When considering the ethics of critique, care, and justice as applied to special education, a shift

in perspective may be necessary to consider the student's needs and how the student will be affected by team decisions is of utmost importance (Moore).

Pathologies of Silence, Difference-Blind Institutionalism and Deficit Thinking

While not specific to special education, aspects of education and race have been addressed in the literature. Pathologies of silence (Shields, 2004) and difference-blind institutionalism (Larson & Ovando, 2001) examine perceived sameness in schools by educational professionals even amidst cultural manifestations of difference. Pathologies of silence focuses attention on professionals who act as if everyone in school has the same values and beliefs and should be treated as such (Shields). This differs from a difference-blind viewpoint in which professionals acknowledge cultural differences but believe such differences have no impact on how educational professionals treat students and their families in schools (Larson & Ovando). Inevitably, both distinct but complementary perspectives show that professionals believe equal treatment is an equitable practice (Shields).

Begley (1999) acknowledged professionals recognize "values manifested by individuals, groups, and organizations have an impact on what happens in schools" (p. 52). However, Shields (2004) suggested this acknowledgement of cultural differences has resulted in deficit thinking. Deficit thinking illustrates the concept of professionals who treat differences in values as deficits and blame poor academic performance of a diverse population of students on these values rather than "tak[ing] responsibility for socially just education in our own contexts" (p. 127). Concepts of pathologies of silence, difference-blind institutionalism and deficit thinking are the keys to discovering the often hidden views of education professionals when participating in multidisciplinary teams in special education.

Summary

This review of the literature revealed complications in defining, measuring, and identifying possible factors contributing to racial disproportionality. In particular, racial disproportionality of Black students in the judgmental eligibility categories of mental retardation/intellectual disability and emotional disturbance was examined as literature indicated these eligibility categories led to the most restrictive placements.

Organizational Learning Theory (OLT) served as a lens to view school district decision making practices to gain richer meaning in relationship to racial disproportionality in special education. Mental models and dialogue that influences individual and team decisions were discussed. Since decisions regarding special education eligibility are made by multidisciplinary teams, concepts regarding the nature of teams, the role of ethics in decision making, and the impact of pathologies of silence, difference-blind institutionalism, and deficit thinking on decision making were examined as well.

Discussed in Chapter Three is a description of the research design and methodology. The rationale for selecting the design of the study, a case study, is described. Presentation of the data findings and analysis of these findings are included in Chapter Four. Findings, conclusions, implications for practice along with recommendations for future research are described in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A review of literature revealed the causes of racial disproportionality are not clear. Some researchers pointed to student and family factors (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000), while others identified school factors (Paul et al., 2001; Coutinho et al., 2002; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Klingner et al., 2005) contributing to racial disproportionality. Regardless of cause, the inappropriate identification of students is the main focus of overrepresentation in IDEA 2004. While research has focused upon the difficulties of identifying the root causes of racial disproportionality, there is a need to examine practices which have resulted in reducing overrepresentation in special education once the evaluation process has begun. The researcher utilized focus groups, interviews, and document analysis in examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge. The cultural underpinnings for the study were Organizational Learning Theory and authentic dialogue.

The purpose of this study was to describe district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. Presented in this chapter is a statement of research questions and the rationale for the use of a case study approach. Also included is a description of the population and sample, data collection and instrumentation, methods of data analysis, and limitations.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was “How do education personnel engage in a learning process through dialogue about sensitive subjects, such as racial disproportionality in special education, in order to change educational practices for the entire school district?” A comprehensive review of literature informed the research questions and guided this study. First, the study focused upon practices education personnel currently engage in that have reduced racial disproportionality in the school district. Next, ways in which practices related to reducing overrepresentation were disseminated to district staff members was examined. Additionally, the study focused upon how race and disproportionality were discussed. Then, the impact dialogue had on learning related to racial disproportionality was determined. Finally, how dialogue informed practices that reduce over identification was examined. The resulting research questions which guided this study were as follows:

1. Which practices did the district engage in that addressed reduced racial disproportionality?
2. How were practices related to racial disproportionality and reducing overrepresentation disseminated to district staff?
3. How are race and racial disproportionality discussed?
4. What impact has dialogue related to racial disproportionality had on organizational learning?
5. How does dialogue inform practices that reduce the over identification of minority students in special education?

Rationale for Use of a Case Study

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are recognized as legitimate, rigorous methods to be utilized for investigation (Creswell, 2003). The research method is chosen for a particular investigation depending on the framing of the research problem and questions. The researcher determined using a qualitative research method, specifically a case study approach, would best address the research questions.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an “umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). In essence, qualitative researchers “are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed” with the goal of understanding certain issues or events in their natural settings (Merriam, p. 6). This meaning is “embedded in people’s experiences and ...is mediated through the investigator’s own perceptions” (Merriam, p. 6). Qualitative research is characterized by researcher as primary instrument, fieldwork, inductive research strategy, and rich description (Merriam; Creswell, 2003). Problems in qualitative research are posed using inquiry words and focus upon a single idea (Creswell, 2003). Additionally, nondirectional and neutral words are used that do not suggest a specific outcome of the research (Creswell, 2003). The researcher must have a tolerance for this type of ambiguity and be highly sensitive to the setting and variables within the setting (Merriam). Framing problems in this ambiguous way allows for an “emergent and flexible [design that is] responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress” (Merriam, p. 181).

While researchers have various designs to choose from, such as grounded theory, case study, and action research, these general designs share common characteristics (Merriam, 1998). No matter which design is chosen, the researcher will spend a large amount of time in the natural setting of a small, nonrandom sample of participants collecting thick, rich description (Merriam). While in the natural setting, the researcher must adjust as new information is gathered and analyzed since qualitative research designs are “flexible, evolving, and emergent” (Merriam, p. 9).

In fact, the researcher must be responsive to new information as it is gathered through data collection procedures, which take the form of interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 1998; Creswell 2003). In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument and can “process data immediately, can clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and can explore anomalous responses” (Merriam, p. 7). In essence, as the researcher filters all of the information through himself or herself from “purposefully selected sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions,” (Creswell, 1998, p. 165) he or she can ask clarifying questions, change and refine research questions, and change the data collection process, depending on the themes that begin to emerge (Creswell, 2003). Themes begin to emerge from information in various forms, such as interview protocols, handwritten notes of interviews, audiotapes, transcription, videotapes, and/or recordings of documents (Creswell, 2003). Various types of analysis of this data, like axial coding and critical discourse analysis, are used to ensure findings are “comprehensive, holistic, expansive, and richly descriptive” (Merriam, p. 9).

A variety of methods ensure the quality and rigor of qualitative research. Rigor in qualitative research is referred to as trustworthiness (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Trustworthiness is demonstrated through careful planning and adherence to quality research. Reliability, the ability to replicate findings, is vital to qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Since the researcher is the primary research instrument, reliability could be seriously affected by the quality of the researcher and his or her adherence to sound data collection procedures. Considering this before, during, and after data collection and analysis allowed for improved reliability. To achieve internal validity the researcher must bring forth findings that match reality through careful analysis of transcripts and documents (Merriam). Data collection processes allow the researcher to triangulate findings to “confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, p. 204) and to establish judgment amongst researchers.

Qualitative data analysis procedures used to ensure trustworthiness include axial coding, triangulation of data sources, credibility, transferability, and audit trail (Creswell, 2003; Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Merriam, 1998). After all interviews and focus groups have been transcribed, the researcher codes themes that emerged from the research. Then during open coding analysis (Merriam), the researcher examines transcriptions and documents for emerging patterns and themes. If possible, the researcher has a second party review the transcripts and document to determine agreement of themes emerging from the data, whether this is a fellow researcher or the subject who was interviewed. The construction of a theme table allows for easier organization of data during axial coding (Merriam). All data from the research are logged and saved. This audit trail ensures that others can return to the research and draw conclusions similar to the original researchers.

Qualitative research methods may be chosen to “reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The emergent design of qualitative research allows for changes to be made as the researcher as instrument studies these parts of the whole since “meaning is embedded in people’s experiences and...this meaning is mediated through the investigator’s own perceptions” (Merriam, p. 6). Since meaning is part of participant experiences and researcher perceptions, the researcher must have a tolerance for ambiguity when problem setting and during the duration of data collection (Merriam). This ambiguity is reflected in the choice of nondirectional words when forming the problem statement (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Case Study

Case study design allows for an “in depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The emphasis in case study design is on the discovery of information, not in confirming the researcher’s hypothesis (Merriam). For both single case and comparative case design, cases are chosen that are bounded systems involving finite data collection (Merriam). A bounded system is a “single entity...around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). A single entity could be a person, a group, a program, or a policy to name a few types (Merriam). Finite data collection means there is an end to the number of people who can be interviewed and the amount of time for observations (Merriam). If there is no end to the number of people who could be interviewed or the number of observations, then it would not qualify as a case (Merriam) to be used in any type of case study design.

Case study designs use “any and all methods of data collection” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28), which can include observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials

(Creswell, 2003). Before conducting an observation or interviewing, the researcher must develop rapport with the participants if thick, rich description is to be obtained.

Developing rapport communicates the researcher cares about and empathizes with the participants as well as the topic being studied. This puts participants at ease and creates an environment where they are more likely to share meaningful information with the researcher. Seidman (2006) cautioned that participants should not be asked to remember specific incidents when interviewing after developing rapport, but instead be asked to reconstruct these situations. While reconstruction “is based partially on memory,” it is also based “partially on what the participant now senses is important about the past event” (p. 88).

Interviews should be conducted to develop thick, rich descriptions of an event or process, integrate a variety of participant perspective, describe a process, develop a description of how a system works or fails to work, and make the reader feel as if they are part of the process (Weiss, 1994). In addition, interviews would be spaced three days to a week apart to allow time for researcher reflection (Seidman, 2006). During this data collection process, the researcher must be highly “sensitive to the context and all the variables within it” (Seidman, p. 20) in order to glean quality information from participants. A researcher knows when he or she has gleaned quality information in the form of rich, thick description when he or she is able to provide “enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situation matches the researcher situation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) and no longer collects new information. Data recording procedures, such as interview protocols, interview notes, transcriptions, and

audio recordings preserve the information for the researcher until it can be analyzed and act as part of the audit trail after the study has been completed.

Participants

A single case study approach was used to study the practices of a suburban school district related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification. The study examined learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. The researcher purposefully selected (Creswell, 2003) a suburban school district in Missouri recently determined to no longer be racially disproportionate. The suburban school district had been identified as racially disproportionate from 2007 through 2010. The district serves over 13,000 students of which 12.2% are Black. The researcher referred to the school district by a pseudonym, Woodhaven School District.

Two teams of process coordinators and an elementary special education teacher were selected as participants based upon their experiences with racial disproportionality in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category in Woodhaven. The first team of process coordinators consisted of seven elementary and middle school K-12 process coordinators while the second team had three high school process coordinators. In the selected school district, process coordinators' primary role is guiding the special education evaluation process. Elementary and middle school process coordinators meet weekly with two assistant special education directors for evaluation review meetings to ensure evaluations meet compliance standards for initial eligibility. High school process coordinators meet once a month with an assistant special education director to discuss

secondary special education issues. All process coordinators, elementary, middle, and high school, meet as a whole once a month with three assistant special education assistant directors to review special education process and procedures.

An elementary special education teacher was chosen based upon experiences with racial disproportionality in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category. Because the researcher's focus was on the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category, an elementary special education teacher in Woodhaven was chosen from an elementary school, which houses a Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability specialized program.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The researcher contacted the superintendent of Woodhaven School District to determine interest in participating in the study. The superintendent was provided with a description of the research study which includes the purpose of the study and a description of the education personnel who would be involved (see Appendix A). After permission was granted, the researcher conducted two structured focus groups and three structured interviews with education personnel in Woodhaven. The participants were given informed consent forms (see Appendix A) which explained the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary. The researcher provided no compensation to participants.

The researcher collected data through focus groups, interviews, and documents to collect thick, rich description to be analyzed. Focus groups and interviews were conducted using open-ended questions from protocols that were developed and administered in mock interviews as field tests before using them with Woodhaven School

District. Additionally, the researcher gathered documents to triangulate findings from both the school district itself as well as from outside sources regarding the school district's racial disproportionality in special education, such as the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the United States Department of Education.

All focus groups and interviews took place on school district property. Two focus groups took place at the Woodhaven School District central office as process coordinators meet there monthly. The focus groups occurred during regularly scheduled monthly meetings to limit impact on participant time. The interview of an elementary special education teacher took place during the teacher's planning period at an elementary school in Woodhaven where the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability specialized program is located. The individual interviews of two process coordinators took place at Central Office after a regularly scheduled meeting. The researcher assured participants that names would be masked, including the name of the school district. Participants were allowed to review the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews to assure the researcher had accurately captured their words and what they intended to convey.

Focus Group and Interview Protocols

The researcher conducted two focus groups and three interviews. The two focus groups consisted of a total of ten K-12 special education process coordinators divided into two groups. From those focus groups, two process coordinators were chosen based upon their knowledge from the focus groups for individual interviews to gather further information one-on-one instead of in a group setting. A third individual interview consisted of an elementary special education teacher. The conversation of each focus

group and interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Each focus group and interview took place in the natural environment for each group or individual and each focus group and interview lasted for approximately one hour.

Organizational Learning Theory and authentic dialogue guided protocol and question selection. Guided by Organizational Learning Theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bruffee, 1999; Fauske & Raybould, 2005; Knapp, 2008; Nonaka, 1991; Schein, 1992; Schein, 1996) and authentic dialogue (Bruffee, 1999; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008), the same protocol was used with the focus groups and interviews in order to determine the depth of learning about race in eligibility determinations (see Appendix B). Process coordinators are involved in the evaluation process as a regularly occurring part of their positions and receive monthly professional development from the district special education office. Special education teachers are involved in the evaluation process more intermittently, depending on if the student being evaluated is in their class (regular education teachers) or in the grade or specialty area to which they have been assigned (special education teachers). Using the same protocol with each group and individual provided insight into how the district constructs and disseminates knowledge to individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole.

Questions for the focus group and interview protocols were selected to “promote self-disclosure among participants” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 7) about a sensitive topic—race. Questions were based upon knowledge gained from reviewing research on misidentification in special education (Artiles et al., 2006; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Knotek, 2003; Overton, Fielding, & Simonsson, 2004; Klingner et al., 2005; Klingner & Harry, 2006; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Rogers, 2002; Rosenfield,

2006). Questions were open-ended in order to glean more detailed explanations and descriptions from participants (Krueger & Casey).

The focus group and interview protocols were field tested prior to use. Member checking by focus group and individual participants, triangulation of information gained from both focus groups, and gathering of rich, thick description were utilized to strengthen internal validity, or accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

Document Analysis

The analysis of district documents was based upon the themes identified from the coding of focus group and interview transcripts (see Appendix B). The documents included in the analysis were the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), the district eligibility template for evaluation reports, including a shell used when writing eligibility determinations for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability, and professional development documents related to race and/or racial disproportionality in the school district such as agendas, participant sign ins, and handouts. The data from focus groups, interviews, and documents were triangulated to further justify themes (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

Data analysis within case study design generally involves the process of coding. Coding is a “systematic process of analyzing textual data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 193), where data are divided into categories or themes to form a detailed description of a process or event. The description of the process or event is only as detailed as the data collected throughout the study. Additionally, since the researcher is the primary instrument in the data analysis of qualitative research, steps must be taken to ensure data is analyzed properly.

To ensure trustworthiness of data collection and analysis, various methods were utilized to be certain of the rigor of the research. Member checks by the subjects of the study were utilized during coding to verify the accuracy of themes or descriptions (Creswell, 2003). In addition, data were triangulated, “using multiple investigators, sources of data, or methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 24). The rich, thick data gleaned from the collection and triangulation allowed researchers and the readers of the research to determine whether findings can be transferred to other similar situations (Merriam). An audit trail was preserved of this rich, thick data, so fellow researchers can determine how data were collected, categorized, and used in the study (Merriam). This audit trail can then be used by fellow researchers to determine if they would conclude the same findings.

After conducting focus groups and interviews with Woodhaven School District, the data were analyzed using an axial coding procedure to categorize the information in the various leadership themes that emerge (Merriam, 1998). Documents, including the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), the district eligibility template for evaluation reports, including a shell used when writing eligibility determinations for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability, and professional development documents related to race and/or racial disproportionality in the school district such as agendas, participant sign ins, and handouts, were analyzed. The researcher utilized information gleaned from documents to triangulate with the data collected from focus groups and interviews. To further ensure trustworthiness and rigor, the researcher had her dissertation chair review the data and themes to determine if she uncovered the same themes and to assist in uncovering any potential researcher bias. Furthermore, the

researcher preserved the audit trail by keeping a copy of all protocols, transcripts, field notes, and documents both in hard copy and electronically.

Summary

Qualitative research is a form of inquiry used to understand a process where meaning is shaped by the views of the participants. The researcher chose a single case study design to explore district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate.

Presentation of the data findings and analysis of these findings are presented in Chapter Four. Findings, conclusions, implications for practice along with recommendations for future research are described in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. A review of literature revealed the causes of racial disproportionality are not clear. Some researchers discussed student and family factors (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000), while others identified school factors (Paul et al., 2001; Coutinho et al., 2002; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Klingner et al., 2005) contributing to racial disproportionality. While research has focused upon the difficulties of identifying the root causes of racial, there is a need to examine practices which have resulted in reducing overrepresentation in special education once the evaluation process has begun.

In this study, the researcher contacted a suburban school district in Missouri that was no longer identified as being significantly racially disproportionate and asked to interview process coordinators and an elementary school teacher. The district studied had been designated beginning in 2007 by the DESE as having a disproportionate number of Black students in the eligibility category of Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability based upon data from the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. The district studied was determined no longer disproportionate by DESE in 2010.

Once the school district was identified, a gatekeeper letter was sent and written permission was obtained from the district superintendent by the researcher. Next, the process coordinators and elementary special education teacher were contacted and

informed consent letters were sent and written consent obtained. These consent forms met with the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri (see Appendix A). Then focus groups and one-on-one interviews were arranged with process coordinators (n=10) and an elementary special education teacher (n=1). All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded. The researcher also analyzed the district's CSIP, a district eligibility template for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability, process coordinator meeting agendas and minutes, special education in-service documentation form, and special education PowerPoint presentations presented during special education in-service meetings.

Organization of Data Analysis

Part I: Demographic Data

The school district selected for this study was a public school district in a suburban area of Missouri. This district was chosen as it had once been identified as significantly disproportionate from 2007 through 2010 and had recently been determined to no longer be significantly racially disproportionate. The researcher referred to the school district by a pseudonym, Woodhaven School District.

The district currently serves over 13,000 students. The district attendance rate is 94.9%. The ethnicity of the student population is 2.5% Asian, 12.2% Black, 5.3% Hispanic, 0.4% Indian, and 78.1% White. Students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch equal 27.2% across the district. The graduation rate is 88.53% district wide. The graduate rate for specific student populations is 89.06% for White students, 85.61% for Black students, 74.12% for special education, and 83.50% for free and reduced lunch. Approximately 46.3% of graduates attend a four-year college or university, 37.4% attend a two-year college, and 0.1% attend a postsecondary (technical) institution. The average

years of experience for all teachers are 13.1 years. The average teacher salary in Woodhaven is \$51,875 with the average administrator salary at \$95,666. The current expenditure per average daily attendance is \$8,446. The funding sources for the district are divided among the following: local 61.6%, state 28.9%, and federal 9.5%.

For purposes of comparison, the State of Missouri has a total student enrollment of 889,772 students. The ethnicity of the state's student population is 1.8% Asian, 17.1% Black, 4.5% Hispanic, 0.5% Indian, and 74.7% White. Students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch equal 47.8% across the state. The graduate rate for specific student populations across the state is 85.21% for White students, 65.61% for Black students, 67.6% for special education, and 74.28% for free and reduced lunch. About 35.8% of graduates attend a four-year college or university, 31.1% attend a two-year college, and 2.5% attend a postsecondary (technical) institution. The average years of experience for a teacher in Missouri are 12.5 years. The average teacher salary is \$45,312 with the average administrator salary at \$83,586. The funding sources for the state are local 57.03%, state 29.31%, and federal 13.65%.

Part II: Compendium of Findings

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Which practices did the district engage in that addressed reduced racial disproportionality?
2. How were practices related to racial disproportionality and reducing overrepresentation disseminated to district staff?
3. How are race and racial disproportionality discussed?

4. What impact has dialogue related to racial disproportionality had on organizational learning?
5. How does dialogue inform practices that reduce the over identification of minority students in special education?

Process coordinators (n=10) and a special education teacher (n=1) were interviewed utilizing a combination of focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Documents, including agendas and comprehensive school improvement plan, were collected. Transcribed focus groups and interviews as well as analyzed documents were coded to identify themes and then triangulated.

Protocol

Prior to conducting research on district premises, the researcher contacted the superintendent of the school district to explain the proposed study regarding practices the district engaged in to reduce overrepresentation of Black students in the category of Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability. In addition, the researcher asked for permission to conduct the study in the school district. The superintendent granted permission for the participation of the school district in the study and signed the informed consent form. The researcher then contacted the director of special education who facilitated the selection of process coordinators and an elementary special education teacher for focus groups and/or interviews. While at the site to conduct focus groups and interviews, the researcher also obtained supporting documents that were to be reviewed for the study.

The researcher followed two ethical guidelines to protect the subjects during this study. Prior to the day of each focus group and interview, each subject received an

informed consent form describing the study, the use of findings, and ramifications for participants, as well as a list of list of questions that would be asked. Subjects signed the informed consent forms noting their understanding. The form indicated that participation was voluntary and they could choose to withdraw their consent at any time. Following each of the focus groups and interviews, participants received an email containing a transcription of the session for verification that their responses and intent were accurately recorded.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted consisting of special education process coordinators. One focus group (n=7) consisted of three elementary process coordinators and four elementary/middle school process coordinators. The second focus group (n=3) consisted of one elementary/middle/high school process coordinator and two high school process coordinators. Each participant received a copy of the focus group questions prior to the focus group interviews. The focus groups were electronically recorded and then transcribed verbatim, redacting participant names, student names, building names, and district names. The researcher e-mailed copies of the transcripts to each of the participants for them to verify the accuracy and intent of their words. In each focus group, the last question asked involved participants adding any information which they believed had not previously been discussed. Contained in Tables 1 and 2 is information about the focus group participants, such as coding of participants, current role in district, and number of years in education. All focus group participants were Caucasian.

Table 1 *Participant from First Focus Group of Process Coordinators*

Participant	Role in District	Years in Education
APC1	Elementary Process Coordinator	23
APC2	Elementary Process Coordinator	18
APC3	Elementary/Middle School Process Coordinator	16
APC4	Elementary Process Coordinator	27
APC5	Elementary/Middle School Process Coordinator	17
APC6	Elementary/Middle School Process Coordinator	10
APC7	Elementary/Middle School Process Coordinator	9

Note: n=7 participants

Table 2 *Participant from Second Focus Group of Process Coordinators*

Participant	Role in District	Years in Education
BPC1	High School Process Coordinator	14
BPC2	High School Process Coordinator	16
BPC3	Elementary/Middle/High School Process Coordinator	22

Note: n=3 participants

Interviews

The researcher conducted three one-on-one interviews—two interviews with process coordinators and one interview with an elementary special education teacher. Each participant received a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. The interviews were electronically recorded and then transcribed verbatim, redacting participant names, student names, building names, and district names. The researcher

emailed copies of the transcripts to each of the participants for them to verify the accuracy and intent of their words. After transcriptions were completed, each interview was analyzed. Table 3 includes information related to each interview participant, such as coding of participant, current role in district, and years in education. All interview participants were Caucasian.

Table 3 *Participants from One-on-One Interviews*

Participant	Role in District	Years in Education
ET1	Elementary Special Education Teacher	6
PC1	Elementary/Middle School Process Coordinator	16
PC2	High School Process Coordinator	22

Note: n=3 participants

Documents

Along with focus groups and interviews, various documents were reviewed to develop a background for this study and for allowing triangulation of data. These analyzed documents included the district’s comprehensive school improvement plan, district eligibility template for Intellectual Disability/Mental Retardation, process coordinator meeting agendas and corresponding minutes of monthly process coordinators’ meetings with special education administration, special education in-service forms documenting monthly professional development of counselors, administrators, and special education teachers by process coordinators, and special education PowerPoint presentations.

Research Questions: Analysis of Data

Research Question 1

Which practices did the district engage in that addressed reduced racial disproportionality?

Woodhaven School District engaged in several practices to address racial disproportionality. Initially, the district engaged in practices to immediately reduce the number of Black students identified as meeting eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability (process coordinator agenda and minutes, May 2009 and August 2009). This step was necessary as being identified as significantly racially disproportionate involves the possible inappropriate identification of students.

Initial meetings in the fall of 2009 focused upon a review of district data related to racial disproportionality (process coordinator agenda and minutes, August 2009 and November 2009). After the initial step, Woodhaven School District engaged in several district-wide measures, such as refinement of the review team, professional development on poverty, new transfer student clubs, co-teaching, and discussions about race.

Reevaluation of Black Students Classified as Eligible for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Category

Process coordinators acknowledged reevaluating Black students was a necessary step in the process of addressing racial disproportionality due to misidentification. They also indicated there was a sense that had students of other races with the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability label been tested, other students besides those who were black may have been found to be misidentified.

I think that when we were looked at to begin with at DESE to simply review the numbers, because our minority population is such a small percentage of our

overall population, but such a large percentage of that minority population were then [identified as] special education. I think that if we would have just blanket-ly said we're going to look at every single child with this label [Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability], and test every single child again, we might have made some additional changes that would not have been based just upon race. (BPC3)

This acknowledgement was the beginning of process coordinator discussion that perhaps factors other than race were involved, such as poverty and transience. Even though the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility of every Black student who may have been misidentified was reviewed and/or reevaluated, this did not result in whole-sale changes of categorical eligibility for all Black students.

We reevaluated students and changed labels—if appropriate. We did not change the label of every African-American student by any means. We really did look at the numbers. We changed some. I'm not sure the percentage—I would think it is small because we still have African-American students in the classes. (BPC3)

Others reiterated the fact that not all Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibilities of Black students were changed.

We tested, I mean, during that particular time, we were told we had to test two. I think they both ended up staying Intellectually Disabled because their adaptive scores were still low, but maybe adaptive scores were low because we had had them in the program for so long. Yes. So they still met criteria for Intellectually Disabled, so they remained Intellectually Disabled. (PC1)

They're still labeled MR in some cases. Just because they're African-American doesn't mean that they can't also be mentally handicapped, but I feel like... we might have changed their disability, or they may have needed remediation and they were not getting it. (BPC2)

In fact, in some cases, additional assessments were given in order to ensure students really did meet eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability. While process coordinators were the staff members primarily tasked with completing these evaluations, other staff were involved as well. One special education teacher hinted at how serious the process was taken by making sure each student met eligibility.

I remember one of my colleagues, maybe a process coordinator said we had to give two adaptive behavior tests just because one came back higher. They weren't sure it was going to make it [meet Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility]. (ET1)

Even for those whose eligibilities did not change, at least one process coordinator when interviewed separately, wondered if some of the students' scores were low by nature of being educated within restrictive placements (PC1).

The Black students who were reevaluated and found no longer to meet eligibility in the category of Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability were still found eligible in other special education categories, such as Language Impairment or Specific Learning Disabilities, through the use of professional judgment, since these students had received significant special education services for several years in many cases. In some cases, reevaluating the students revealed the students' difficulties more clearly.

From this view what the students had were language disorders actually. They [district special education administration] came up with language testing for us to do and when we reviewed the data, it appeared there was more difficulty with language, and that was an interesting component I thought, that that was where they really needed help. (APC4)

However, process coordinators pointed out that these changes in eligibility did not mean the students were capable of completing grade level work satisfactorily. One high school process coordinator noted:

It seems like we changed their label, but that didn't make them more able to participate in a regular education. They didn't go up in ability. We didn't change their ability level one bit. All we did was change their label. We might have changed how we provided services—but not for long periods of time. We had to pull them back self-contained. (BPC3)

The notion that some of the Black students whose labels were changed continued to be served in largely self-contained classrooms is a concern. One of the major concepts revealed in the review of literature was that one of the harmful effects of Black students

labeled as Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled was that students were educated in separate settings from regular education peers and tended to remain in those placements (Cartledge, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Rueda, Klingner, Sager, & Velasco, 2008; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). It appears that changing the eligibility labels may have reduced the number identified as Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled but did not have a lasting effect of improving the quality of education of those students.

District-wide Review Team of Eligibility Criteria

Three years prior to beginning reevaluations of Black students identified as Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled, the Woodhaven School District had formed a review team, consisting of all of the district's process coordinators. This review team was responsible for reviewing the testing information on all initial evaluations and reevaluations when changes to eligibility were being proposed to determine that each file met Missouri's eligibility standards. In essence, the review team was instituted to ensure each evaluation was comprehensive and contained all of the legally required components for eligibility (district eligibility template for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability). One reason this group was established was to provide additional oversight to staff in buildings as it had become apparent that some buildings were qualifying students for special education who did not necessarily meet all of the standards in order to "help" the student (APC4, APC5, BPC1, PC2).

I think eligibility team was starting to function then, but it wasn't really as structured in following the eligibility criteria. It wasn't even happening at that time; I can't remember. But, so I think that's part of it too, that individual buildings were making decisions on eligibility and a team wasn't agreeing upon that, like a district-wide team. (APC5)

With the knowledge that the district had been identified as racially disproportionate, the group of process coordinators reviewed each case involving Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability more closely and required process coordinators to identify the race of each student when presenting information to the group.

I think we did end up doing a lot of more in-depth reeval[uation]s on some of those students who we had collected data on, that had the low IQs, but didn't necessarily have the adaptive behaviors to support that, or even language scores to support it, and were able to re-look at those and determine whether they really did qualify for special ed, or whether we were able to change their diagnosis to something else. (APC1)

District-Wide Professional Development on Poverty

While not directly related to the race or special education, district-wide professional development was also provided on poverty based upon Ruby Payne's book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (CSIP, 2010). A commonly held belief in the Woodhaven School District was that the majority of Black students inappropriately identified as Mentally Retarded/Intellectual Disabled were transfer students from a neighboring urban school district.

Many of these youth who transferred were impoverished, especially in comparison to the other students and families in Woodhaven. All process coordinators were required to attend district-wide Ruby Payne training conducted during the 2009-10 school year in the buildings to which the process coordinators were assigned (process coordinator agenda and minutes, August 2009). One process coordinator reported this addressed a district need:

That was the district's way to try to somewhat address our concerns with a transient population and/or students coming from [urban school district]. It didn't address race, per se, but it was important to who we were getting transfer in. (BPC2)

New Student Club for Transfer Students

Building upon lessons learned from Ruby Payne, some schools created new student clubs in order to provide support for students new to Woodhaven School District. However, one of the process coordinators who spoke about the club indicated it did not have the desired result (BPC1).

The building administration started a new students' club. I had culture shock when I went to other districts and saw these things going on in [those] schools, so I imagine students had culture shock coming into our district. I think administration realized that they needed to do something to help these kids acclimate and they needed to work with them in groups. It was never about kids just from one school district though—it was kids transferring from any school district. They were trying, but because race is a difficult thing to do. But they were trying to tell the new kid about how they're different from the school you came from, what the teachers expect, and how the kids act, and try to listen to them. (BPC1)

Co-Teaching

While isolated teams of teachers had begun co-teaching in classrooms, Woodhaven School District began a more structured program of implementing co-teaching beginning with the 2009-2010 school year. The implementation of co-teaching attempted to reduce the number of students in restrictive placements as well as improve academic achievement as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). While teachers reported improvements in co-teaching classes with existing students, the district's percentage of special education students in restrictive placements (greater than 80% of the day in special education) had not improved (see Table 4). Woodhaven was just in its third year of a structured co-teaching program and in its initial stages in some of its schools. It is too early to determine the success of this program in reducing restrictive placements. None of the documents analyzed suggested an impact of co-teaching on reducing racial disproportionality.

Table 4 *Percentage of Special Education Students in Restrictive Placements*

Year	Missouri Target	Woodhaven
2009-2010	10.4%	16.0%
2010-2011	10.3%	16.27%
2011-2012	10.2%	17.52%

Note: From *Missouri Comprehensive Data System* by DESE at <http://mcds.dese.mo.gov>

A benefit to co-teaching as noted by a participant is that two teachers are available in the classroom to assist all students in the class by utilizing several co-teaching structures. One process coordinator reported the benefits:

Well both buildings that I have, middle school and elementary, the middle school teachers are just loving the fact that they're doing the co-teaching and are able to help those kids who don't qualify, but they're in the classroom. They cannot only help their kids but also any other kids that are struggling. And I think that, I really think—I don't have any data to support it—but I really think that it is helping kids overall. (APC5)

Discussions about Race

As the demographic of Woodhaven has changed due to the increasing numbers of transfer students from local urban districts who are Black, increased attention has been given to diversity. Several process coordinators indicated that their buildings had structured staff training on diversity issues (APC1, APC2, APC3).

The number of minority administrators and teachers is quite small in Woodhaven. Those buildings who have minority administrators and teachers reported that their conversations about diversity were more personal and may have made more of an impact with staff members.

Well, ours [diversity training] was done by two African-American administrators so I think, well, I heard one of the administrators simply pointing out that the demographics of the middle school have changed quite a bit, and people are not

realizing. I think she drew from some personal experiences. I don't know if I can remember specific references, but I mean, it was pretty interesting and just kind of shed a different light on a personal way of thinking, and I'm sure for everybody else. (APC3)

Another process coordinator shared about an African-American administrator in her building discussing race.

She talked a lot about her own personal experience, being in the Woodhaven School District. (APC2)

Summary

By analyzing and triangulating focus group and interview transcripts as well as collected documents, the researcher found Woodhaven School District engaged in a variety of practices to reduce overrepresentation. The reevaluation of Black students who may have been misidentified had the greatest impact on reducing overrepresentation. From these reevaluations, students who were misidentified were found eligible in other, more appropriate categories. Data, however, revealed changing eligibility did not have an effect on restrictive placement for many of these students. Due to engaging in targeted reevaluation, the district review team continued to engage in the learning process about race and special education eligibility. District discussions about poverty and race increased knowledge of teachers throughout the district, especially in buildings with minority administration. The new student club was found to be unsuccessful in reducing racial disproportionality. In addition, documents did not support focus group discussions that co-teaching may have impacted reducing overrepresentation.

Research Question 2

How were practices related to racial disproportionality and reducing overrepresentation disseminated to district staff?

In order for a district to make lasting changes, disseminating information to appropriate staff is a necessary first step. How practices were disseminated to staff and to which staff is important in understanding the organizational learning process at Woodhaven.

Process Coordinators

District special education process coordinators were the key staff members involved in initial practices to reduce significant racial disproportionality in Woodhaven. Process coordinators were involved in the dissemination of knowledge in two ways. First, process coordinators received information about racial disproportionality from district special education members and engaged in discussions with each other (process coordinator meeting agenda and minutes, May 2009, August 2009, and November 2009). Second, process coordinators were responsible for sharing and discussing this information with special education staff in their buildings, counselors, and administrators (District Special Education In-Service Documentation Form).

In discussing with process coordinators how they first became aware of racial disproportionality in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category, two camps arose. On one hand, some process coordinators were aware of a concern before DESE identified the district as being significantly racially disproportionate. One process coordinator became aware of the concern in discussions with a previous special education administration and reported:

I knew probably two years before the Director of Special Education at the time retired. An Assistant Director, I think, was aware of the problem and tried to bring it forth, and not a lot was changed because we weren't getting any flak from the state at that time, so it was kind of overlooked. And then when another Director of Special Education came on board, it was like we needed to do something because the state was contacting us about it. (APC5)

Other process coordinators who were aware of the concern earlier indicated they knew there was a problem without being notified by administration. Each process coordinator detailed what they saw as follows:

Well, all you had to do was just walk in the room [room for students labeled Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled]. It was pretty obvious. It was really intense when you walked into some rooms... But in the high school, when you put them all together in one room, it was pretty apparent. (BPC3)

I would walk into the MR/ID program room and see a lot of African-American students in there. They didn't outnumber other races, but there was more than should have been. It was more than there would have been if I had walked into a regular ed[ucation] English class. But it was that year I was working in the school that I was thinking all the problems started—or at least I was made aware of the problems from CO. It was pretty compelling data at my school. (BPC2)

Another way process coordinators became aware of a problem with racially disproportionality was by being informed by district special education administration. At the process coordinator meeting in the spring of the 2008-2009 school year, the special education administration staff distributed a letter from DESE regarding disproportionate representation, which asked the district to review and verify district race data (May 14, 2009 Agenda and Minutes). One process coordinator explained:

I go between buildings and I guess it just didn't ... I mean, I think at the time, I don't remember how long ago it was, but I was probably at the elementary level. If you're out in a higher end [high socioeconomic] elementary, or a place like that, that have the lower transient, it's not as noticeable. So I probably, I wasn't aware of it coming from between those buildings. Even walking into the high school, I probably just went in and did my job. You know what I mean? I didn't put percentages to it until I was appointed process coordinator, and you're like, oh. I was sitting in a meeting and it was obvious that as far as race goes, we were over diagnosing students. We looked at the numbers on the DESE printout and it was obvious. (BPC1)

Special Education Teachers

Process coordinators were responsible for disseminating information from meetings to the special education staff within their buildings as well as counselors and

administrators (district special education in-service documentation form). In addition, special education teachers in buildings who had Black students labeled Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled also would have been involved in the review of files and subsequent reevaluation of some of the Black students suspected of being inappropriately identified. Determining how special education teachers became aware of the district being identified as significantly disproportionate and what they remember of the information gives insight into how knowledge is disseminated and learning occurs within the district.

Three of the current process coordinators were teachers during the 2008-2009 school year and during the time period where reevaluations occurred during the first semester of the 2009-2010 school year. One of the current elementary process coordinators who had taught in a building that contained a special program for students labeled Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled indicated the magnitude of the concern expressed to building special education staff:

I know when I found out about it, I was just still teaching, and [another process coordinator no longer in the district] was the Process Coordinator. I remember her at least telling us that things needed to be looked at a little bit more closely, and if I recall, that instead of maybe paper re-evaluations [requiring no additional data gathering through administering assessments], if you will, that they were actually doing a thorough evaluation on some of the kids that might fall into that category. I just remember that it was a big deal. (APC3)

Another elementary process coordinator indicated that a more global discussion occurred with the special education staff in the building when she was a teacher:

I was a teacher at the time and became aware from my process coordinator then. She talked with us about race and special education. (APC2)

A third process coordinator, who works with both elementary and middle schools, noted that discussions about overrepresentation occurred over a time period of more than one day:

Our whole special education team talked about it a couple of Fridays when we did our meetings. (PC1)

A high school process coordinator reported her initial conversations with staff involving moral obligations to students who may have been misidentified. She reported:

I told them that it [reevaluation of Black students identified as Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled] was for a lot of different reasons. One, we were required to, that we were being asked to look at it. And I think that we also talked about how important it was to get that correct because it is the beginning stage of high school. We complained so much because there were so many kids that were not appropriately placed. Or, maybe sometimes kids are immature, and they get to this level, and everything starts kind of kicking in, they have such great growth here. So we kind of feel a moral obligation to get it right here too, whether they need to be moved up in class, or need to be moved down so that they can still achieve a diploma, because it flows both ways with that moral obligation. (PC2)

An elementary special education teacher who taught students who met eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability during this time period and afterwards reported:

I think like three years ago our Process Coordinator told us that we needed to reevaluate all of the black students within our department, and that we did not do it [inappropriately identify students]--that other people had done the actual total evaluation labeling them mentally retarded—not us. (ET1)

Regular Education Teachers

In Woodhaven School District, regular education teachers are the ones who most often make referrals of students who experience school difficulties for special education evaluations. This pre-referral stage is an important one in reducing special education overrepresentation. While process coordinators are not directly responsible for disseminating information to regular education teachers, regular education teachers are,

nonetheless, important to the referral process. The majority of special education staff interviewed was not aware of how or if regular education staff were made aware of district overrepresentation of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability category.

One process coordinator indicated she had shared information directly with a regular education staff member who coordinated the student assistance team in her building. She noted:

I shared it with the student assistance team because, like I said, we can't have all of these referrals of just students who are black. So a lot of that I shared it with her. Not necessarily with the whole student assistance team, I don't know, I can't remember. (PC1)

In addition, the student assistance team, as outlined in the district CSIP, indicated staff on the team would implement a process to screen all students needing specialized assistance. Specialized assistance does not mean special education.

When interviewed, an elementary school teacher indicated she was unsure what the student assistance team in the school knows about race and special education. She related:

I'm not on the student assistance team, so I don't really know a lot. I just hear the regular [education] teachers, you know, going through all this information and everything. I guess—not that I am involved any way. (ET1)

Summary

Focus group, interview, and document analysis revealed process coordinators to be the main avenue for how knowledge on racial disproportionality and reducing over identification was distributed to district staff. Once process coordinators received the initial information from district special education administration, process coordinators then provided the knowledge to special education teachers, counselors, and building

administrators in their weekly special education meetings. More targeted information was shared beyond initial discussions if the building had to conduct one of the reevaluations due to suspected misidentification. There is no information to suggest regular education teachers were systematically informed of racial disproportionality.

Research Question 3

How are race and racial disproportionality discussed?

Initial knowledge about racial disproportionality was disseminated from district special education administration to process coordinators and from process coordinators to special education teachers (district special education in-service documentation form). Parents have also been involved in conversations directly related to their individual children. The methods in which subsequent conversations about race and racial disproportionality were discussed provided insight into the learning of individuals and of the district as a whole. General discussions regarding race and racial disproportionality took place in large building staff meetings and smaller groups of teachers while specific student discussions took place by small groups of teachers familiar with the student.

Staff Discussions about Racial Disproportionality

Process coordinators were greatly involved in the initial discussions on race and racial disproportionality as they were instrumental in conducting reevaluations on Black students identified as meeting eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability. When describing how process coordinators discussed race in the years after the initial task of conducting reevaluations, one process coordinator noted:

Not now, it's not hardly [discussed] at all. Well, I guess I'd say process coordinators talk about race the most because we were part of the team to look at the students initially. We went through it. We know. (BPC3)

While process coordinators indicated they knew the most about the issue of overrepresentation, the deliberations in the buildings with and between other education staff members highlighted how race and racial disproportionality were discussed, if at all. One process coordinator summed up the realities of this topic when reporting, “Race is difficult to discuss.” (BPC1)

All of the process coordinators interviewed shared their perspective that poverty is also linked with race discussions and indicated the district had provided district-wide poverty training based upon Ruby Payne. One process coordinator shared her perspective on a presentation to building staff by two administrators who are Black. The presentation involved discussing not only race but poverty. The process coordinator reiterated the different perspective education staff members who are Black can provide to teachers who are White about the experiences of Black students in Woodhaven (AP3). The same process coordinator went on to report that further discussions of the topic occurred in middle school team discussions (APC3).

One process coordinator interviewed was a teacher at the time in the same building where the two African-American administrators presented. She reiterated that discussions continued daily in grade level team meetings but perhaps not in a targeted way. She recalled:

We had our teams and things that we worked together with and discussed the topic after presentations at that grade level. I don't know if there were specific student conversations that came up. (APC2)

Not every process coordinator reported that these diversity discussions were influential. One high school process coordinator recounted:

And the administration also tried to address concerns with transfer students from [urban school district]. It wasn't like training though. I felt like they

[administration] felt they said certain things to be politically correct when talking with us about these students rather than having a conversation about race, poverty. (BPC2)

However, another high school process coordinator saw this as a sign that “there were conversations taking place [at the administrative level]” (BPC1).

Process coordinators also shared how race was discussed regarding specific students. One process coordinator emphasized race can be a factor in the pre-referral stage.

In the pre-referral stage, I mean, it doesn't come up unless I take a deeper look at it [the referral]. And having that whole underlying discussion of, okay, especially when it's the first time ever in education, Kindergarten students, and that's a lot of times, those are the populations in which they make referrals [of students who are Black]. (APC1)

Another process coordinator indicated that race is not always discussed directly even though the information can be important.

I would say we talk more about which district a student is coming from although that specific student's background is important to uncover in the one situation that I deal with. (APC6)

Discussions about Students Transferring from Urban School Districts

Many of the process coordinators indicated that staff focused upon and discusses in greater detail characteristics of students who transferred from urban school districts rather than discussing race. One process coordinator reported:

I've always heard too, if you think about it, students that transfer in from [urban school district] regardless of race, they [teachers] always talk about how delayed they [the students] are because our curriculum is so ... we expect more, you know, from our students who are in the district. Our curriculum is more advanced, and so when they transfer in, it seems like they're already behind. (BPC3)

In fact, another process coordinator reiterated the focus is upon students transferring from a local urban school district and that race does not play a part in the

decision regarding special education. She indicated that for any student transferring from the urban school district, “We have found all sorts disabled from that district—not just African-American” (BPC2).

Similarly, a process coordinator also shared that now staff members are experiencing a freedom to be able to discuss characteristics of students from the urban school district.

We have the courage to talk about what kind of places they’ve been in like [urban school district]. We know it’s a failing school district. (BPC3)

However, another process coordinator indicated some caution was exercised in the discussion of culture as staff members are not sure of each other’s view on the subject.

I guess that the culture of the school the students attend now is important but we more discuss the culture of the school that they came from. In that way, we don’t have to talk about a student’s culture—that’s difficult to do if you don’t know where everyone stands. It is safer to talk about the culture of the school or school district the student is from. (BPC3)

A process coordinator also reported staff discussions about urban school culture and indicated staff uncertainty of action when the student does not qualify for special education.

We talk about school culture a lot when students transfer—with teachers, counselors, and administration. We just don’t know what to do when the culture does not value school, and the student has a low IQ, and the parent is not involved. What do we do if they are not special education? (BPC3)

Discussions with Staff about Race and Special Education

Discussions within buildings regarding the topics of race and special education were discussed in small groups of teachers who were familiar with the students. In some situations the cultural differences between schools became more of the focus rather than

discussing race. A process coordinator described the nature of these conversations and the difficult task of determining what to do for students who are testing low cognitively but are not meeting eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectually Disability. She explained:

I think we are having conversations—maybe not race—but culture like they said. We just aren't having large formal discussions. People who are involved with specific students might talk about a student's background. We collect background on all special education students when we test. I think where we are stuck is what do you do with that? Do you really not help a kid who is low cognitive? Do you really think they can do the work unassisted? Really? That's a hard pill to swallow. Seriously. (BPC3)

Another process coordinator reported the same concerns but indicated more time may need to be given for transfer students from urban school districts to adjust.

I think we have staff discussions in our building as far as what does it really mean to be ID [Intellectual Disability], and somehow, or in looking at that cultural difference with some of those kids that are moving in, that's different than moving to [Woodhaven] and it is a big shock. We have to give them time to adjust and keep saying that to the staff, that they're remembering that, and not just saying how low academically they are. (APC3)

Process coordinators also shared the information about the discussions regular education staff has about race and racial disproportionality prior to making student referrals. One process coordinator explained:

They know information but not to the degree process coordinators know. I'm more speaking that regular education does not have those discussions. Although I would say in the last three years, even my counselors would be like, "So and so thinks that this child might need a referral for special education, but they're African-American." Our counselors were very aware of what we were going through. And our level of consciousness over the issue has been raised. But now I see a different picture coming in because it's not so much the color of their skin, but the situation as to why they're here, that is now impacting a lot of ... I think that's where a lot of our referrals are coming, and I think it's shifting. It's not so much color. It's more economical status and situation. That's just the same situation to deal with but a different color. (BPC3)

Another process coordinator indicated the topic of race was often avoided and gave her perspective on the reason.

I think it was discussed more when I went to the middle school last year. I think it was more of that they took that into account I think a lot better than they did at the high school. But I think at the high school, the pressure is on graduating and getting them to graduate, and they don't want to take that hit type of thing. Or, if middle school has that student, they just will provide some additional supports or, you know, baby them a little bit like they would in elementary. But it is discussed, not as much as they are in the sense of how many times have they moved, how many schools have they been into, trying to address that more. It's almost like they don't want to say it because they're scared that they think they're going to be racist in the sense of addressing it, but they try to do it other ways around it and address it. But I guess that's their way of looking at it, but it's not discussed like it should be in the high school. (BPC2)

However, she also reported she was more vigilant about engaging the staff in discussions about race and racial disproportionality in the initial year after finding out the district was significantly racially disproportionate.

But when we were going through it, I think I was a little bit more vocal. Like, when we'd get those referrals during those initial years, those referrals [referral of Black students] I'd want to discuss more. If they were African-American, I would say this is what we're seeing with our Mental Retardation numbers. I'd be like let's look at the bigger picture besides numbers. Let's look at their background, but I think it could easily come back to being us having a problem again. (BPC2)

Discussions with Parents about Special Education

Several process coordinators indicated discussions about specific students have occurred with the students' respective parents/guardians. These conversations revealed discussions focused more upon the student's previous educational experiences and moving often from school to school rather than discussing race. One process coordinator shared a recent experience she had with a parent who just wanted help for her child, whether special education or regular education. She recounted the following experience:

I find that the parents don't really care if it's special education. They're just saying, "I want help for my child," and they're not getting help. And this may be

the only way for them to get help. I was in a meeting a couple of weeks ago where a young African-American child did not qualify. His mother had referred him, and still it came back to he needs help. He needs some tutoring in math. Is there anybody in the building—his mother said, “Is there anybody in the building that would be willing to do it for like \$15-20 an hour? I can’t afford the \$30. He needs help.” (APC1)

Another process coordinator also indicated a need to educate parents about the differences between school districts and expectations. In that way, parents can be educated on the fact this may be the concern rather than suspecting a disability. She reported:

To me it’s about educating a parent who is referring about what actually special education is versus at-risk and what you’re being exposed to. Many of the parents, two of the kids’ parents have said they’ve seen a significant difference in the curriculum from where they came from and what we’re teaching here. And so that played into our discussion of it pre-referral stage, talking about, well this is where they’re performing, this is how much they’ve acquired, you know, how they’re progressing, and we need a way to continue to monitor that. Not necessarily consider the student special education student. And they seem to be good about understanding that once you explain it to them. (APC4)

This has been the experience of another process coordinator as well:

I would agree. I had one just like that last year, and it was actually a grandma, and she was very frustrated that he didn’t qualify, and got very upset during the meeting because she knew he needed help, and we weren’t going to give it to him basically is how she was feeling. We weren’t going to help her grandson. (APC3)

Summary

An analysis of focus group and interview transcripts disclosed approaches in which race and racial disproportionality were discussed in Woodhaven School District. No information provided to the researcher suggested the specific topic of racial disproportionality was discussed in large group settings, such as district professional development or building staff meetings. However, information on poverty and diversity was discussed at building staff meetings. Data suggested some staff members within

buildings had general small group discussions on the topics. Targeted conversations in small groups occurred regarding specific students. These discussions tended to focus more upon students transferring from a local urban school district rather than upon race. Data analyzed indicated this was due to discomfort in discussing race.

Research Question 4

What impact has dialogue related to racial disproportionality had on organizational learning?

According to those interviewed, conversations related to racial disproportionality had an impact in three ways. Participants discussed the impact on educator knowledge and practices, the need for intervention strategies, and the need for continued dialogue.

Dialogue Impacts Educator Knowledge and Practices

In a district, such as Woodhaven, with limited staff diversity, one process coordinator remarked on discussions about race involving staff members who are Black which educated other staff members about race and urban school districts. The process coordinator provided insight into a discussion between teachers who are White and teachers who are Black concerning a student struggling in school who was Black and from a local urban school district. She reported:

We were staffing on a student at staff meeting the other day for an African-American student...two of his teachers were African-American, which I think that's probably the first time I'd ever had that. It was very interesting to hear the conversation between the white teachers and the African-American teachers. They were trying to blame it [student's school difficulties] on the fact that the student came from [urban school district] and the other people [who were African-American] were saying, "Well, I have nephews that have gone to [urban school district], and they've gotten a great education." And so it was pretty interesting to be in that type of conversation, but we have very few African-American teachers in this school district. So I think we need to start getting some more of those people who are able to kind of advocate for these kind of kids, and they kind of

know their culture a little bit better and what they need, and stuff like that. (APC5)

Process coordinators indicated urban students were often immediately evaluated after beginning to attend school in Woodhaven. After engaging in district and building discussions about race and poverty, one participant shared how this knowledge has impacted practices.

We [Process coordinators] have to give them time to adjust and keep saying that to the staff. They [Teachers] are remembering that and not just saying how low academically the transfer students are. (APC3)

However, the participant also indicated there are still challenges with some staff members:

But I still hear after going through all that, “Yes, but the child needs help; they’re only going to get it if they go to an ID [Intellectual Disability specialized] program.” (APC3)

A process coordinator also cautioned against just waiting for students to adjust to the expectations of a suburban school district, which she indicated has happened especially since Missouri removed professional judgment from Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability in 2010.

It [removing professional judgment from Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility] shifted to accepting that some kids just are not going to progress very quickly. I think the district has kind of shifted to that acceptance a little bit, which in some ways, because there’s not a lot of supports available in the building, sometimes those kids are kind of just left to progress slowly instead of making things up to do that. (APC6)

However, another process coordinator who previously was a counselor shared her view that there are more options to provide for students who are struggling in school now than in the past. Teachers are sharing strategies and interventions with each other and are discussing concerns in student assistance team meetings. She reported:

My regular education teachers at the elementary school really go above and beyond on helping kids, coming early in the mornings, staying late. And I know, it's a whole new atmosphere for me because it's so changed from when I was in a building 15 years ago as a counselor, because there was nothing for them at all. And so to me, I'm pleasantly surprised with all the stuff that's going on out there. (APC5)

Dialogue Highlights Need for Intervention Strategies

Process coordinators also indicated that dialogue has highlighted a need for further intervention strategies in the district. The district's CSIP outlined training for teachers in differentiated instruction as well as reading and writing strategies. As teachers are learning through staff discussions that students from urban areas should not be immediately referred for special education and assumed to be low functioning, staff members are discovering a lack of resources for strategies if special education is not used. This point was emphasized in discussions an elementary process coordinator had with regular education teachers in an elementary school building:

I feel like sometimes when kids aren't eligible for special education, teachers present to me, "Well, no one's going to help them. What are we going to do now? You're just going to let them fall through the cracks." And I'm thinking, this child is not Intellectually Disabled. There's a way for them not to fall through the cracks, and that's for regular education to provide for them. (APC1)

An elementary/middle school process coordinator also indicated teachers have reported in staff dialogue about particular students that they are in need of strategies and interventions for those students who are Black, have limited academic skills, and transfer in from urban school districts. She reported reasons why teachers immediately want to refer to special education:

I think it's because they [the students] are from [urban school district], because they're black, and it's pretty much as soon as they hit the door. I mean, they [the teachers] will have them there for a little bit, and they [the teachers] are like, oh my gosh, they can't, they can't write, they can't do anything. (PC1)

A high school process coordinator reported the same concern at that level:

We've got to work on other programs for students if we aren't going to label them special education. To be honest, if we didn't label some of them as Mentally Retarded, then they would be regular education—no sped labels at all. Students with IQs that low don't often qualify in other areas and do not do well in regular education curriculum. (BPC3)

Dialogue Highlights Need for Continued Discussions about Race and Special Education

An elementary/middle school process coordinator reinforced a concern with the pressure she has been experiencing when discussing eligibility with regular and special education staff. In these discussions, she described pressures to qualify a student for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability even though he does not meet initial Missouri eligibility. She reported:

I almost kind of feel like staff is pushing more for him to be in special education because of race because he is so low. With this particular kid, it's been brought up quite a bit. So we've talked about it a lot, and there have been two other kids that they've been wanting to put in Intellectual Disability program just because their cognitive ability is lower, and they're not performing well but adaptive behavior is higher. (PC1)

One process coordinator even shared a concern for students who are in special education and are Black but are not labeled Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled and not served in programs primarily for students meeting that eligibility. She reported concerns some staff expressed about how low functioning they were in comparison to others with the same disability.

I think there was a concern too of all the African-American students that were just in our self-contained special education classes who did not have that label, but how low they were compared to some of the other children in that same program [resource special education program]. (BPC2)

Participants who were interviewed indicated continued professional development about race and special education was needed. One elementary process coordinator

summed up the need for a different type of professional development in order to continue to address race and special education concerns. She reported:

I would say training, but knowing my particular case managers who go through training and then come back and tell me they didn't pay attention to anything, that they didn't feel it applied to them. I don't necessarily think that training is the thing. It's almost like they have to actually go through the process themselves, do a hands-on deal where they go through the whole evaluation and determine it on their own and see the light that way. Because the training, they just sit there, sure that's what you're saying. And that's what I've been doing with them. I've been trying to train them and say, "That kid's not Intellectually Disabled unless they also have those low adaptive scores." (PC1)

Summary

The impact of dialogue on organizational learning was examined through an analysis of transcripts and documents. Dialogue about race and special education appeared to generate greater knowledge of the topic with staff members, although process coordinators acknowledged teachers need time to internalize the knowledge and apply it to real situations in the school. Dialogue amongst building staff members also revealed an expanded need provided at the district level for intervention strategies for students experiencing difficulty with grade level and content knowledge, as well as a need for further discussions about race and special education.

Research Question 5

How does dialogue inform practices that reduce the over identification of minority students in special education?

Participants revealed that dialogue has impacted organizational learning by both increasing knowledge and highlighting continued needs within the learning process.

Dialogue also informed practices that have reduced the over identification of minority

students in special education through educating staff about special education and determining a need for further discussion about poverty and at-risk students.

Educating Staff about Special Education Eligibility

Since process coordinators were tasked to conduct the reevaluations of Black students suspected of being misidentified as Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled, they were provided with an opportunity for hands-on professional development in determining eligibility. Continued professional development has occurred at monthly process coordinator meetings and weekly review meetings when discussing eligibility requirements while reviewing real files. One process coordinator who used to be a teacher during the time the district was initially identified as significantly racially disproportionate reported how much she has learned since becoming a process coordinator and participating in the review team:

At least I understand really how a kid qualifies. And I would say before I started being a process coordinator, I didn't really understand. A kid qualified, I had him [in class]. I gave him the services. I just did it. And I think that's probably where our biggest problem is, is those case managers don't understand that eligibility. (PC1)

The district special education appears to have come to this same conclusion and began providing district-wide professional development regarding eligibility determinations during the 2011-12 school year (PowerPoint Presentation, October 31, 2011).

Determining Need for Discussions about Poverty and At-Risk Students

Participants also indicated that dialogue about the over identification of students and the reasons for over identification have resulted in the district providing professional development on poverty and at-risk students. All process coordinators interviewed indicated misidentification of students who met eligibility for Mental

Retardation/Intellectual Disability mainly has been due to poverty. Included in Table 5 are the district and state percentages for free and reduced lunch as well as percentages of Black students for both as a comparison of trends. One process coordinator indicated that through building discussions, they determined the overarching factors of poverty and at-risk were present when being found eligible for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability when the student clearly did not meet eligibility. She indicated:

I worry if we focus on race we are missing the boat. It's really about where the student is from and upbringing. Maybe we are really over identifying at-risk students and poverty students.(BPC2)

Another process coordinator reiterated this:

I think it's shifting. It's not so much color. It's more economical status and situation, and we've become one of those stops on the, "I'm homeless and I don't have any money." (BPC3)

Table 5 District and State Percentages for Free and Reduced Lunch and Black Students

Year	Free and Reduced Lunch		Black Students	
	Woodhaven	Missouri	Woodhaven	Missouri
2005-2006	14.1%	41.7%	8.1%	17.9%
2006-2007	15.7%	40.8%	9.1%	18.1%
2007-2008	16.4%	41.8%	9.9%	18.1%
2008-2009	17.8%	42.1%	10.5%	17.9%
2009-2010	20.7%	43.7%	11.4%	17.8%
2010-2011	24.3%	46.9%	12.0%	17.8%
2011-2012	27.2%	47.8%	12.2%	17.1%

Note: From Missouri Comprehensive Data System by DESE at <http://mcds.dese.mo.gov> .

As a result of conversations about how individual students came to be labeled inappropriately, the district provided training on the principles about which Ruby Payne has written and presented around the nation [CSIP, 2009; Agenda, August 2009].

Several process coordinators identified poverty training and subsequent discussions as educating staff about students they tended to refer for special education (APC7, BPC2). Two process coordinators reported different experiences with poverty training. The first process coordinator, who works with elementary and middle school, focused upon how dialogue about poverty changed understanding.

Because understanding poverty I think has been a focus for the district as well, you know, coming in and doing whole staff understanding of what Ruby Payne discusses, with understanding poverty, what that looks like, doing book studies on it. I know some buildings have done that, and I think that that has helped to change their understanding of these students that are coming in. (APC6)

An elementary process coordinator reported meetings about poverty but indicated this did not necessarily result in a change in practices.

At our staff, it was the whole staff. It was an opportunity before school. The whole staff was expected to be there numerous times. I mean, I think we met four different times and went through that process. (APC3)

A high school process coordinator reported increased awareness in staff after training even if the building felt that the topics did not directly related to them (PC2).

Summary

The researcher analyzed transcripts and documents to examine the ways dialogue informed district practices to reduce over identification. The dialogue of process coordinators at review team meetings, by all accounts, improved knowledge of eligibility practices. Dialogue in school buildings especially regarding students who transferred to Woodhaven from a local urban school district revealed a district need for discussions and

training regarding poverty at-risk students. As a result, the district provided professional development on poverty and diversity.

Summary

Presented in Chapter Four was the demographic data for the school district included in the study. A description of the protocol used in the study, including the methods of data collection and the process of data analysis followed. The focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analyzed to address each of the five research questions. In Chapter Five, an overview of the design and procedures utilized for this study are described. A discussion of findings with limitations and design control are included. Additionally, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This qualitative case study was conducted to examine the learning processes and dissemination of knowledge and their impact on reducing overrepresentation in a Missouri school district. While research has focused upon the difficulties of identifying the root causes of racial disproportionality, there is a need to examine practices which have resulted in reducing overrepresentation in special education once the evaluation process has begun. Provided in this chapter are the purpose of the study as well as the design and procedures used during the inquiry. The study findings are discussed along with the implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. The literature revealed the complexity of determining the causes of inappropriate identification of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Knotek, 2003; O'Connor and Fernandez, 2006; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002; Overton, Fielding, & Simonsson, 2004; Rogers, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson, & Kushner, 2006) and a lack of research in practices to reduce inappropriate identification after a student has been evaluated. The intent of this

study was to assist districts currently identified as being disproportionate by examining practices that may have attributed to reducing the over identification of Black students in special education in a district which is no longer identified as being disproportionate..

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Which practices did the district engage in that addressed reduced racial disproportionality?
2. How were practices related to racial disproportionality and reducing overrepresentation disseminated to district staff?
3. How are race and racial disproportionality discussed?
4. What impact has dialogue related to racial disproportionality had on organizational learning?
5. How does dialogue inform practices that reduce the over identification of minority students in special education?

Design and Procedures

The researcher selected a qualitative single case study design in order to study the practices of a suburban school district related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification. The researcher examined learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. A suburban school district in Missouri recently determined to no longer be racially disproportionate was purposefully selected by the researcher (Creswell, 2003). The suburban school district had been identified as racially disproportionate from 2007 through 2010. Permission from the Superintendent was secured in the school district

allowing for the participation of district special education process coordinators and an elementary school teacher in the study.

Special education process coordinators and an elementary school teacher were then contacted to schedule focus group and determine interviews times and locations. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded. The researcher also gathered and analyzed the district's comprehensive school improvement plan, district eligibility template for Intellectual Disability/Mental Retardation; process coordinator meeting agendas and corresponding minutes of monthly process coordinators' meetings with special education administration; special education in-service forms documenting monthly professional development of counselors, administrators, and special education teachers by process coordinators; and special education PowerPoint presentations for data collection.

Summary of Findings

Students who have been determined to have met eligibility criteria for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability are likely to be educated in restrictive placements that are often permanent (Cartledge, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Rueda, Klingner, Sager, & Velasco, 2008; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Once in these restrictive placements, students tend to be provided with limited access to general education experience, the least experienced teachers, and substandard curriculum (Ferri & Connor; Rueda et al.).

While any student in restrictive placements may have limited opportunities, Black students inappropriately identified as being disabled are least likely to be educated in a regular class for most of the day while White students are more likely to be educated in the regular education environment (US DOE, 2009). While special education programs

are intended to meet the needs of students with disabilities in order to allow them to reach their full potential, the least restrictive environment appears to be general education where expectations are set high and the curriculum is challenging (Rueda et al 2008.). Identifying and examining practices that may reduce the overrepresentation of Black students in special education would seem essential to providing greater opportunities for participation in the regular education environment in schools.

Themes

The researcher used the qualitative inquiry process to provide a framework for determining ways in which education personnel engage in a learning process through dialogue in order to change educational practice for an entire school district. Through analyzing the data obtained from focus groups, interviews, and documents, three themes emerged. The themes were as follows: (1) impact of dialogue on knowledge creation, (2) impact of dialogue on determining further district needs, and (3) implementation of district-wide initiatives for change. The themes reflect the influence dialogue has on organizational learning (see Figure 1).

Impact of Dialogue on Knowledge Creation

Organizational learning theory has placed an emphasis on individual, team, and organizational learning through dialogue (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Nonaka, 1991; Bruffee, 1999; Eraut, 2004; Fauske & Raybould, 2005, Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008). Dialogue is needed for individuals and teams to exchange ideas and learn from one another in order to create shared understanding and knowledge (Mazutis & Slawinski). As a result of this knowledge creation through conversations, better decisions can be made in teams (Bruffee).

Figure 1. *The influence of dialogue on the learning process.*



When the district was initially identified as being significantly racially disproportionate, the district special education office began dialoguing with process coordinators during regularly scheduled meetings about race and the eligibility category of Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability. Analyzed process coordinator meeting agendas and minutes indicated the initial conversations with process coordinators occurred in May 2009—at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Documented, formalized conversations between process coordinators and district special education administration continued to occur in August 2009 and again in November 2009 (process coordinator meeting agenda and minutes).

Through focus groups and interviews, it became apparent that the team of process coordinators created a shared knowledge of eligibility practices through repeated dialogue and hands-on review of specific student data. The process coordinators interviewed reported having a greater grasp of these concepts than others because they went through the process together and discussed their findings throughout the process

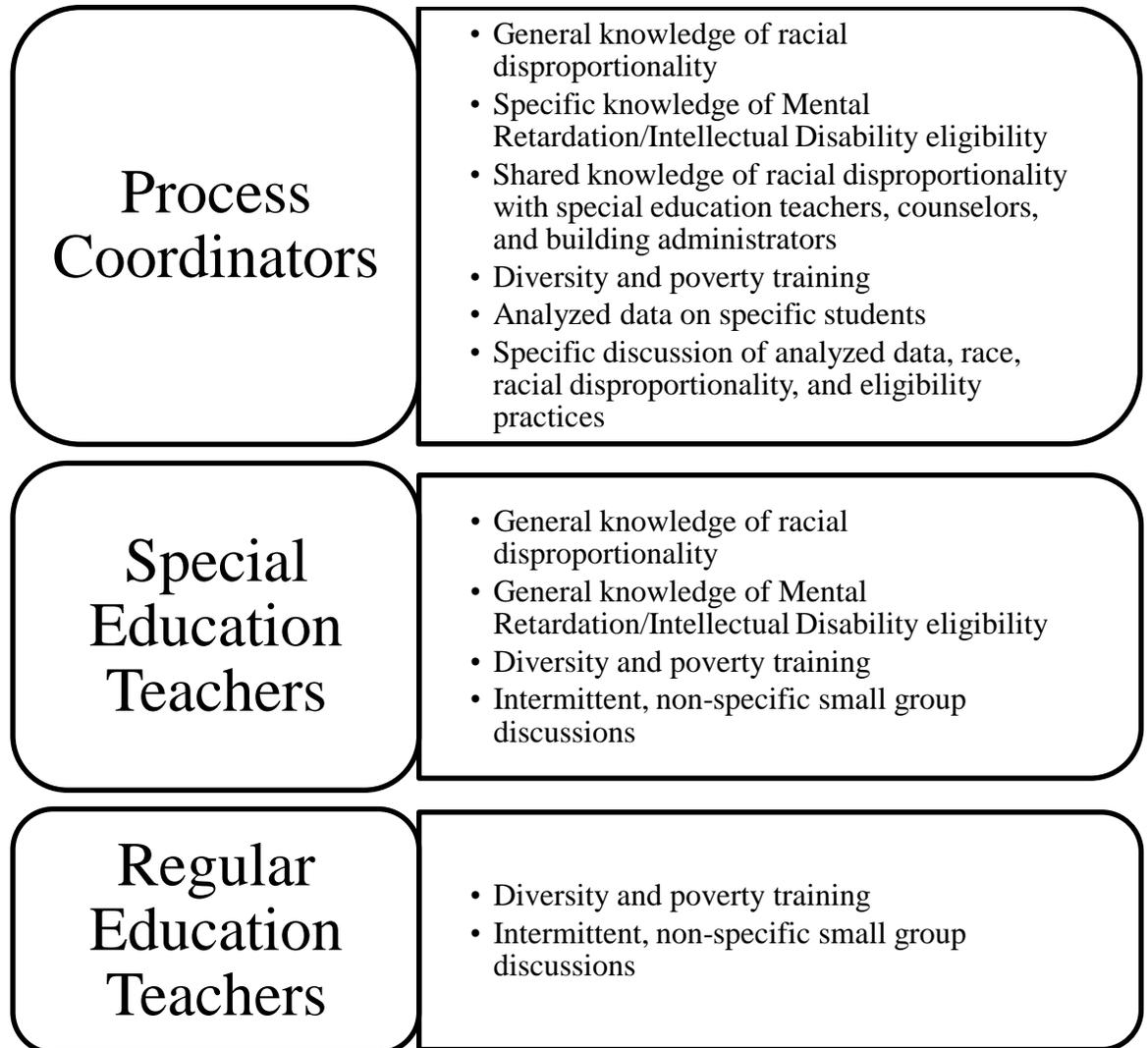
(APC1, APC4, BPC2, BPC3, PC1). The same level of knowledge was not created in individual school buildings even though building level and small group discussions took place in many buildings. The data suggested the key to the depth of knowledge created by process coordinators involved discussions of race and special education not only in a global manner but in an individual manner as process coordinators reviewed and discussed evaluation data from individual student cases and applied these data to eligibility criteria (see Figure 2).

In addition to discussions amongst process coordinators, diversity training was provided to teachers and led by building administration. Data gained from process coordinators who had Black building administrators reported that diversity training conducted by Black administrators who could discuss personal experiences made an impact on staff and developed into further dialogue amongst teaching staff (APC3, APC5). Other process coordinators did not remember details of their building(s) diversity training.

The data obtained through focus groups and interviews with process coordinators and an elementary special education teacher indicated dialogue about inappropriate identification in buildings revealed poverty was more of a factor than race. Several process coordinators suggested dialogue within individual buildings shaped the notion that transfers from urban districts (whose students tended to be poor and Black) were more likely to be identified as meeting the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability category (APC3, APC4, BPC2, BPC3, PC1, PC2). Transfer students from urban school districts were primarily referred for special education as the curriculum in Woodhaven appeared more challenging than the curriculum the transfer students had been exposed to

in the urban school district. As a result, Woodhaven instituted district-wide professional development utilizing principles from Ruby Payne’s book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, in order to assist staff members in understanding the culture of poverty.

Figure 2. *The depth of knowledge of district staff members.*



The level of dialogue resulting in knowledge creation varied amongst district staff in Woodhaven. Dialogue resulting in shared understanding and knowledge occurred at the process coordinator level. Since research did not focus upon district administration,

there is not enough information to determine if this level of knowledge was also created between process coordinators and district special education administration. While discussions also occurred between process coordinators and building special education staff, data does not suggest the same high level of knowledge creation was achieved as amongst process coordinators. One difference of note may be that building special education staff was not involved in the repeated analysis of student data as process coordinators were as part of the district review team. Building level training in diversity generated higher levels of internalization when dialogue included staff of different races. Greater amounts of knowledge were shared about poverty than race as focus group and interview data revealed staff members experienced greater comfort speaking about poverty. However, data do not reveal that knowledge about poverty was internalized.

Impact of Dialogue on Determining Further District Needs

Authentic dialogue allows for the possibility of engaging in double loop learning (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008) where procedures, practices, and the values and beliefs they are based upon are questioned. The encouragement of authentic dialogue allows individuals to discuss and confront conflict through “balanced, open and transparent communications between the individual and group levels and then the group and organizational levels” (Mazutis & Slawinski, p. 447). Dialogue in which exploring and questioning is encouraged results in teams which are more likely to discuss issues that are sensitive in nature with less chance of negative consequences to the discussions (Mazutis & Slawinski).

The data in this study indicated dialogue, whether occurring amongst process coordinators themselves or amongst a variety of staff members at the building level,

uncovered further questions and highlighted district needs related to concerns with racial disproportionality. A few of the process coordinators reported that initial conversations in their buildings have highlighted a need for more training on race and/or poverty and special education eligibility. Two process coordinators reported staff has continued to refer students who are at-risk knowing the students are not disabled (BPC2, PC1).

Further data obtained through focus groups and interviews revealed a significant concern regarding the availability of interventions and strategies for students who struggle with academic tasks in school. Several process coordinators reported both regular education and special education teachers have informed them in pre-referral conversations that teachers refer students who are having academic difficulty because there are no other significant supports available to them (APC1, APC3, APC6, BPC2, BPC3). While the district has remediation programs for reading, these programs—computerized reading programs and literacy coaches—are not available in every building and are only available to a limited number of students (CSIP, 2010). This information suggested dialogue has revealed a district need which may result in greater access to regular education remediation programs prior to or instead of special education referral.

The process coordinators and elementary special education teacher interviewed indicated global building conversations have occurred regarding race. However, data from interviews suggested staff is reluctant to discuss individual student concerns in an open manner (APC2, APC3, ET1, PC1, PC2). This suggested a discomfort with talking about a sensitive subject: race. This was a concern as data gained from process coordinators revealed discussions regarding individual students increased both individual and group knowledge about race and special education.

Implementation of District-Wide Strategies for Change

While district leadership may have led the charge for implementing district-wide strategies for reducing racial disproportionality, teaming was essential in coordinating activity and was an avenue for collective learning (Morgan, 2006). Additionally, organizing staff members in teams was seen as an avenue for effective and enduring change (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Meyers, 2004). Teaming provided the structure needed for planned change and deliberative learning to sustain turbulent change efforts while allowing for joint improvisation to respond to the changing environment (Heller & Firestone, 1995). However, sometimes teams make decisions regarding short term solutions which may not yield long term gains (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Initially, a short-term strategy to remove Woodhaven School District from being identified as significantly racially disproportionate was the focus as DESE demanded immediate reduction of misidentification which would require reevaluation of those students who may have been inappropriately identified. The review of all files for Black students found eligible for Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability occurred in the fall of 2009 (process coordinator meeting agenda and minutes, August 2009). The process to reevaluate those who were determined to possibly be misidentified occurred during the 2009-10 school year (process coordinator meeting agenda and minutes, August 2009 and November 2009). According to data gathered through interviews with two process coordinators, this initial review and reevaluation process did not yield lasting knowledge and would not have created enduring change as it was reactive in nature with district and building staff convinced the problem of over identification did not begin with them (APC1, APC4, BPC3, PC1).

While the reevaluations that occurred in 2009-10 were a reaction to an immediate need, other long-term strategies were also implemented, such as reaffirmation of the review team, further dialogue about race and poverty, and co-teaching structures. The review team consisting of all district special education process coordinators began during the 2005-06 school year. The review team was charged with reviewing all special education initial evaluations and reevaluations, involving a possible change of disability, for compliance. Prior to the review team, IEP teams experienced pressure to make students eligible based upon the student needing “help,” regardless of whether the student met all eligibility criteria (APC4, APC5, BPC1, PC2).

After proceeding with the process of conducting reevaluations for possible misidentification, the review team, as a special education strategy, became more focused upon Missouri eligibility criteria and ensuring IEP teams conducted in-depth evaluations (APC1, APC5). Process coordinators were expected to provide information regarding the student’s background and all current testing information required for eligibility to the review team. One process coordinator reported during a focus group that race was one of the pieces of data that had to be shared with the review team (APC1). The review team was tasked with ensuring eligibility compliance was met; however, IEP teams were the ultimate decision-makers regarding special education eligibility.

One result of review team meetings was continued discussions about race when reviewing individual files for compliance with Missouri eligibility criteria. Data gathered from focus groups and interviews indicated that while these in-depth discussions may have continued with process coordinators, school buildings struggled to discuss race (APC1, APC2, APC3). These conversations appeared not to be systemic in nature.

Therefore, only three process coordinators reported discussions about diversity in buildings with mixed results (APC1, APC2, APC3).

While discussions about race occurred regularly in process coordinator meetings but in a limited fashion at the building level, dialogue about poverty became a district-wide strategy for targeting a growing district need (process coordinator meeting agenda and minutes, August 2009). Data gathered from several process coordinators suggested building staff more easily engaged in dialogue about poverty at the building and individual student level than about race (APC3, APC6, BPC2, PC2). The district sent selected staff to train-the-trainer Ruby Payne sessions and had those individuals train building staff (process coordinator meeting agenda and minutes, August 2009). The data suggested strategies related to poverty were well-received by staff although teachers were not of the opinion they were adequately able to teach students from poverty who may have significant academic gaps.

One strategy that targeted a wide variety of students is co-teaching. Woodhaven has implemented co-teaching and the middle and high school levels as a strategy to improve both special education placement and achievement. For the past three years, Woodhaven has strategically implemented co-teaching at the high school level led by district regular and special education administration as well as building administration; however, co-teaching was enacted prior to this in a limited fashion amongst interested teachers. Data collected from a focus group revealed teachers believe they are able to reach more students who need help in the classroom than ever before (APC5). If more teachers report being able to help students, this may result in increased academic achievement and decreased special education referrals. However, Woodhaven is currently

in its third year of a structured co-teaching program and in its initial stages in some of its schools; therefore, it is too early to determine the success of this program in reducing restrictive placements. In addition, none of the documents analyzed suggested an impact of co-teaching on reducing racial disproportionality.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the data in this inquiry which included the key role of dialogue, changes in both district practice from lessons learned and continued dialogue. The data revealed that dialogue, whether in small groups or large, played a key role in implementing and continuing district-wide change.

Key Role of Dialogue

In the review team of process coordinators who have engaged in consistent dialogue about race and special education, there was far more evidence of knowledge creation and learning. Perhaps this is due to the small team size (n=14) in comparison to the number of teachers in individual district school buildings. Buildings who engaged in some degree of dialogue about race were more likely to have an impact on building staff if the conversation involved a Black administrator or teacher who would share personal knowledge on the subject openly—even if consensus of issue was not reached. It appeared these discussions may allow staff a forum for discussions about race with staff members they know and with whom they work.

While conclusions from repeated dialogue about specific students revealed the possibility that poverty was a greater factor than race in disproportionality, evidence also existed that poverty was easier for staff to engage in dialogue about with others. This may be due to the fact that a person could be called racist for openly discussing unfavorable

views on race and poor academic performance, but no such equivalent word exists for those who discuss these same types of views on poverty and poor academic performance. When the effect of poverty on student learning was discussed, however, it appeared to be in relation to how these students have gaps in knowledge and will struggle in school. No evidence from this study suggested individual teachers or teams discussed strategies for these students as a whole or individually. Instead participants indicated teachers were asking to be provided intervention programs for students.

Even if teaching staff engaged in race discussions in a broad sense, the amount of learning acquired by the team of process coordinators suggested discussions regarding individual students are needed to increase knowledge about factors that may result in misidentification. Data revealed conversations about race regarding individual students occurred on a limited basis within school buildings.

Changes in District Practices from Lessons Learned

While being identified as significantly racially disproportionate may have spurred initial change, prevention from returning to the list requires continued change. Reevaluating students and changing Missouri eligibility for individuals would provide a solution to the immediate problem. If Woodhaven did not continue to refine district practices, such as the special education review team, then the district would find itself identified as racially disproportionate again in the future.

Based upon the knowledge gained from the reevaluations conducted in 2009, the review team, consisting of all process coordinators, began, in earnest, to review initial and reevaluations with eligibility changes on a weekly basis. This was done to assist buildings in ensuring each evaluation report and conclusion met Missouri state eligibility

criteria. The review team had learned through dialogue with each other and building staff that IEP teams, led primarily by district staff, made students eligible for special education even if the child was not disabled in order for the student to receive help. In some of the cases of misidentification, IEP teams made Black students eligible in the category Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability, so the students would receive highly structured assistance. Once process coordinators as a group discussed the ramifications of placing students who were not Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled in a program of that nature, the review team became more vigilant in ensuring Missouri eligibility criteria were followed. Process coordinators realized identification of Black students as Mentally Retarded/Intellectually Disabled was not a viable solution for students who struggle in schools but was, in fact, harmful to the students.

Changes in District Practices from Continued Dialogue

Knowledge was gained from dialoguing about personal experiences in the classroom, in other school districts, and with a variety of people. The knowledge gained prompted staff to question current practices and implement strategies to address district and building problems. Dialoguing about race and racial disproportionality in regards to determining what to do if providing a Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability label is not the answer revealed other concerns teachers had for students. Dialogue revealed, and poverty data from DESE confirmed, that the number of students receiving free and/or reduced lunch has increased to a marked degree in recent years (see Table 5, Chapter 4). Ruby Payne training was only the beginning for Woodhaven. Current dialogue reveals teachers requesting further interventions and strategies for teaching students who may be disadvantaged due to socio-economic status. Data revealed poverty, more than race, is the

current concern in Woodhaven. Continued dialogue about school experiences as more students enter the district will further change district practices in the coming years.

Implications for Practice

The activities in which Woodhaven engaged to no longer be significantly racially disproportionate and the continuing effort to remain this way are complex. Numerous factors must be considered and accounted for throughout the process. It must be understood that this process is unending as a district must remain vigilant in its efforts. The process involves administration at all levels as well as regular education and special education teachers, working together. If regular education and special education remain divided, then each will blame the other for lack of student success and strategies and interventions for student learning will be minimized.

Responsiveness to racial disproportionality and poverty has implications to school districts. In the climate of the No Child Left Behind Act where districts are held accountable for the learning of every subgroup, districts are motivated to implement strategies, interventions, and programs for both staff and students. In order for districts to begin addressing concerns with race, poverty, and special education, district and building level administration need race, poverty, and special education training if they are going to be successful in provide instructional leadership to their staff to address racial disproportionality.

After being trained, district and building administration should promote learning about race and poverty through dialogue with staff. While professional development presentations may provide a foundation for later discussions, these presentations rarely involve internalizing learning as participants are passive instead of active. After these

types of presentations are provided at the building level, building administration should divide staff into teams to actively engage in book study to more intimately discuss topics in a smaller setting.

After gaining more knowledge through book study, principals should organize teachers to engage in review of student information for a specific student that are shared by these teams of teachers. Staff members should be given information about which subgroups the specific student will be categorized in for AYP purposes. Engaging in data analysis of individual students would promote greater learning and would provide an opportunity for teachers to apply the knowledge gained from professional development presentations to students with the intent of determining strategies and interventions needed to support the student. Principals would assist teams in brainstorming or acquiring necessary resources. Each of these teams would meet regularly to review the student's progress and data as well as alter strategies and interventions as needed. Positive changes in teacher knowledge as evidenced by improved student learning should then be discussed at the building level, so successful interventions and strategies can be shared and support be given to other teams going through the same process with other students.

District and building administration and teaching staff need to determine methods in which to prepare for transfer students from urban school districts to suburban schools. One method is for a district to be proactive by talking with parents and students who transfer into the school district about experiences in the previous school district, including school academic and behavioral expectations. In turn, the suburban school district should be forthright in explaining current district academic and behavioral expectations. These discussions can occur in one-on-one interviews between

administration and/or counseling with students and parents when initially enrolling or as a follow up within thirty days of enrollment. From these discussions, the suburban school district can then prepare for supporting the student early in the transfer experience. Additionally, district staff could conduct home visits with the families of students who transfer to gather greater perspective on students.

Preparatory programs for principals and teachers should include components of how to engage in authentic dialogue about sensitive subjects. Educators are increasingly aware of the need to discuss issues such as race and socioeconomic status. However, these conversations will continue to occur in isolation if educators are not given the tools for how to converse on these sensitive topics with others.

District special education administration must provide targeted professional development to both regular and special education staff regarding Missouri eligibility criteria for special education. While the main responsibility of process coordinators may be evaluations, they are not the only staff members involved in the evaluation process. If all staff is aware of general concepts of the special education process and eligibility, then greater understanding can be developed between regular and special education staff. Once professional development is provided in a general way, buildings should continue discussions about the special education process in the pre-referral stage.

As long as it is easier to refer a student to special education than it is to implement strategies and interventions, over identification will always be a concern for Woodhaven as well as other districts. Districts with these concerns may consider implementing a Response to Intervention (RtI model). RtI includes high quality instruction, frequent assessment, and evidence-based interventions. The purpose of RtI is increase student

outcomes by identifying learning and behavioral problems, providing evidence-based interventions to address these problems, and gathering information on student achievement through frequent progress monitoring. In addition, some districts and states utilize RtI to assist in identifying learning disabilities.

District-wide interventions and strategies for students who may have gaps in learning should be easily accessible to all staff. District and building administration should gather information from research as well as from teacher leaders in the district regarding successful interventions and strategies. A bank of these strategies and interventions should be available to all district staff. While this will not eliminate the need to engage in individual student data analysis to determine gaps in performance, the bank will make it easier for busy teachers to access suggestions for assisting students and be more responsive to student needs.

Introducing or increasing the number of reading specialists or literacy coaches in a school district may assist in addressing gaps in reading. In many districts, programs implemented by literacy coaches are often full. As a result, students who transfer to a school district may be unable to access a literacy program provided at school in addition to the reading instruction already provided by the teacher. Increased time spent working on reading skills can begin to close the gaps in student performance for students in AYP subgroups.

In a climate in which districts are facing budget constraints, school districts may consider creating regular education cooperatives. Districts belonging to the cooperative could share reading specialists, behavioral specialists, and instructional coaches. In this

way, districts can find a cost-effective method of providing targeted regular education interventions that would typically be costly.

To increase support for students in classrooms, districts should consider implementing a systematic co-teaching model. While co-teaching traditionally occurs with a general and special education teachers as partners, co-teaching can utilize any two certified staff members. Co-teaching provides frameworks allowing teachers to be immediately responsive to student learning and needs within the classroom whether the students are general or special education students.

Districts may also consider more an in-depth intervention, such as a school-within-a-school initiative. The school-within-a-school concept is the creation of a smaller, more personal learning environment within a larger school building that has its own programs and teachers. Variations of this can include a smaller environment that shares teachers with the larger school. A benefit to this concept is the ability to personalize the education of students in order to be more responsive to students needs and to create connections with students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study indicated that district staff identified poverty and transfer students from urban school districts, not race, are primarily responsible for the district being identified as racially disproportionate. In order to study this issue, detailed information (race, socioeconomic status, districts and schools attended) would need to be collected on each student who had been misidentified rather than reviewing district data as a whole. Knowing the causes of racial disproportionality can lead to better solutions to

the problem. If districts treat the wrong cause, they may be more likely to have continued concerns for student achievement. Further research is needed to study this issue.

The discomfort of staff members in discussing sensitive issues, such as race, was mentioned repeatedly by participants in the study. If teachers feel uncomfortable conversing on these issues and avoid these topics, then true discussion of all data related to a student may not be examined. In this case, a teacher may apply an intervention or strategy that has no chance of success since critical data regarding the student was not considered. In a time when students and families are increasingly experiencing economic stressors such as homelessness, joblessness, and poverty, teachers must be willing to discuss and face these issues as a team. Therefore, further research into teacher discussions of sensitive topics must be conducted.

Another issue that surfaced was the perceived lack of knowledge of special and regular education staff regarding eligibility for special education. Process coordinators report the greatest knowledge since they are the ones primarily responsible for evaluations in the Woodhaven School District. Regular education staff primarily refer students who are struggling for special education testing although they may not understand the special education process or have knowledge of the categories of eligibility. Therefore, a study that examines teacher knowledge of the special education process and special education eligibility needs to be conducted.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification

by examining learning processes and dissemination of knowledge within a school district no longer identified as racially disproportionate. The researcher focused upon one school district that was no longer identified as being significantly racially disproportionate.

Overall, the participants in this inquiry identified several practices the district engaged in to reduce overrepresentation. Participants agreed the district had engaged in a number of positive practices and indicated a need for additional dialogue to enact further change. Discussed were several implications for practice as well as additional recommendations for further research that would add to the body of knowledge.

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Appendix A

Permission Forms and Informed Consent Forms

1. Superintendent Permission for School District Participation Letter
2. Superintendent Permission for School District Participation Form
3. Letter of Informed Consent
4. Informed Consent Form

District Gatekeeper Permission for School District Participation Letter

Dear <Title> <First Name> <Last Name>:

I would like to request your permission to invite applicable special education process coordinators and five teachers (two special education and three regular education from an elementary school with a program for students identified as meeting Missouri eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectually Disability) in your school district to participate in a research study entitled: *An Examination of Practices for Reducing the Overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Eligibility Category through Organizational Learning Theory and Authentic Dialogue*. The information gathered should be helpful in providing insight into practices a district can engage in to reduce overrepresentation of minority students in special education. The findings could serve to assist districts in identifying how learning strategies can be applied at the district level for change. This study is part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For the study, <Name of District> was selected from Missouri as a district no longer identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as having significant racial disproportionality. I am seeking your permission as the Gatekeeper administrator of the <Name of District> to contact special education process coordinators and five teachers (two special education and three regular education from an elementary school with a program for students identified as meeting Missouri eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectually Disability) for the purpose of inviting their participation in this study. They will then be asked to participate in one of three one-hour focus group sessions on-site. Two of the focus groups consisting of process coordinators will meet at Central Office. The focus group consisting of teachers will take place in their school building. Also, two of the process coordinators will be identified for a follow up to the focus group in the form of an individual interview. A copy of the focus group and interview protocols and the informed consent forms are attached for your review. In addition, I am seeking your permission to review related documents the district is willing to share.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. The participants may withdraw from participation at any time they wish without penalty, including in the middle of or after completion of the focus group or interview. Participants' answers and the buildings' identities will remain confidential, and separate from any identifying information. The researcher will not list any names of participants, or their corresponding institutions, in her dissertation or any future publications of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation either by phone at (816) 668-9837 or by electronic mail at jibrown92@sbcglobal.net. In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, who can be reached at 660-543-8823 or by email at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

If you choose to allow me to contact school personnel in your district regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. You should retain a copy of this letter and your written consent for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill K. Brown

Doctoral Candidate

Administrative Permission for School District Participation Form

I, _____, grant permission for special education process coordinators and five teachers (two special education and three regular education from an elementary school with a program for students identified as meeting Missouri eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectually Disability) in my district to be contacted regarding participation in the study *An Examination of Practices for Reducing the Overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Eligibility Category through Organizational Learning Theory and Authentic Dialogue* conducted by Jill K. Brown, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect process coordinators and teachers choosing to participate:

- All participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.
- All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
- All identities and affiliations will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- The focus groups and interviews will take approximately one hour to complete and will be tape recorded.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for teachers in your school district to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for School District Participation Form*, seal it in the enclosed stamped envelope, and return to Jill Brown as soon as possible.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for special education process coordinators and five teachers (two special education and three regular education from an elementary school with a program for students identified as meeting Missouri eligibility for Mental Retardation/Intellectually Disability) in my district to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position:

School/District:

Letter of Informed Consent

[Date]

Dear (Participant):

Thank you for considering participation in a research study titled *An Examination of Practices for Reducing the Overrepresentation of Blacks in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Eligibility Category through Organizational Learning Theory and Authentic Dialogue*. This study is part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a special education process coordinator or teacher involved in special education eligibility determinations in a district no longer identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as having significant racial disproportionality.

The information gathered should be beneficial in providing insight into practices a district can engage in to reduce overrepresentation of minority students in special education. The district [gatekeeper] of [the employing institution] has approved your participation.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of knowledge about district practices related to reducing the overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category due to inappropriate identification. The researcher will examine the learning processes and dissemination of knowledge and its impact on reducing overrepresentation in a Missouri school district.

The following questions guide this qualitative study:

1. Which practices did the district engage in that best reduced racial disproportionality?
2. How were practices related to racial disproportionality and reducing overrepresentation disseminated to district staff?
3. How are race and racial disproportionality discussed?
4. What impact has dialogue related to racial disproportionality had on organizational learning?
5. How does dialogue inform practices that reduce the over identification of minority students in special education?

Before you make a final decision about participation, you must know how your rights will be protected:

**INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
PROCESS COORDINATOR AND TEACHER PARTICIPANTS**

- Participation in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. If later you do not wish the data you provided to be used, inform me; your wish will be honored before culmination of the study. Your refusal to participate will have no adverse consequences. For any questions about your participation in this research, please contact me at 816-668-9837 or by e-mail at jibrown92@sbcglobal.net. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Barbara Martin, at (660) 543-8823 or by e-mail at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

- As an interview participant, your name and answers will remain confidential; only my dissertation supervisor and I would have access to identifiable data. Focus groups and interviews will be audio taped. Any materials identifying specific individuals, district, or school will be kept locked and destroyed three years after the completion of this project. Data collected from the school participants will be coded for qualitative analysis, and summarized for reporting. Results may be published in *Dissertation Abstracts* and in professional journals at any time, protecting your anonymity and confidentiality.

- Your control as to which focus group and individual interview items you choose to answer ensures that there will be no identifiable risk for you greater than that encountered in your everyday life. Ethical guidelines about Protection of Human Subjects set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations “45 CFR 46” will be upheld. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

- This research has been preauthorized by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri-Columbia. If you have further questions regarding research participants’ rights, please contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585.

If you elect to participate and make your professional perspective count as part of this study, please review the Informed Consent form at your earliest convenience and return it to me, signed and dated. Keep this letter for future reference, if you wish. The focus group interview will take no more than one hour to complete. In addition, if chosen, an individual follow up interview will take place lasting no more than one hour. A self-addressed stamped envelope has been provided or you may scan and e-mail your signed informed consent to me at jibrown92@sbcglobal.net.

Your participation is very valuable. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill K Brown
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri-Columbia

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the study *An Examination of Practices for Reducing the Overrepresentation of Black Students in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Eligibility Category through Organizational Learning Theory and Authentic Dialogue* by Jill K. Brown, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

- My participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of _____ the study.
- My responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
- My identity and affiliation will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.
- The focus group and interview will take approximately one hour to complete.
- Focus groups and interviews will be audio taped.
- The researcher will review any school documents that I deem important to the study.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records or if you have questions please contact me. If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached **signed consent form**, seal it in the enclosed envelope, and return to Jill Brown as soon as possible. ***Please be sure to include contact information so interview plans can be made and communicated to you.***

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

School/District: _____

Contact Information:

Phone _____ (circle one) WORK HOME CELL

Best time for contact: _____

E-mail: _____

**Please return to: Jill K. Brown, 1404 NW 48th St.
Home Phone: 816-220-9632 Cell Phone: 816-668-9837
Email: jibrown92@sbcglobal.net**
Appendix B

Instruments

1. Focus Group Protocol – Special Education Process Coordinators
2. Interview Protocol – Elementary Special Education Teacher
3. Interview Protocol – Process Coordinators
4. Document Analysis Form

Focus Group: Special Education Process Coordinators

Date:

Start Time:

Introduction:

Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to discuss into practices a district can engage in to reduce overrepresentation of minority students in special education. My name is Jill Brown, and I will serve as the moderator for today’s focus group. The purpose of today’s discussion is to get information from you about overrepresentation of minority students in special education. You were invited because you are all process coordinators for the school district.

Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. If you want to follow-up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, disagree or give an example, feel free to do that. I want this to be more of a conversation among yourselves, so don’t feel like you have to respond to me all of the time. I am here to ask questions, listen and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. Please speak up and remember only one person should talk at a time.

Our session will last about an hour, and we will not be taking a formal break. Feel free to leave the table for any reason if you need to. No names will be included in any reports. Let’s begin by going around the room and finding out more about each other.

Questions	Information
1. Tell me your name, and how long you have been in your current position and been in the school district.	Learn about participants
2. What do you think are the factors that contributed to initially being identified as having significant disproportionality in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category for students identified as Black.	Questions 2 and 3
3. In what ways were you made aware of the overrepresentation of Black students in the MR/ID eligibility category?	Question 3
4. What has been done to reduce overrepresentation in your school district?	Questions 1 and 2

5. What types of opportunities for formal and informal professional development regarding race and special education have been provided?	Questions 1, 2, and 5
6. How often is race discussed by both regular and special education staff? Probe: Who discussed race implications and when?	Question 3 and 4
7. Tell me about a time race was discussed prior to, during, or after an eligibility decision. Probe: What was the content and result of the discussion?	Questions 3, 4, and 5
8. How have conversations about race changed or affirmed eligibility practices?	Questions 4 and 5
9. How important is it to discuss race when considering special education eligibility for ID/MR? Probe: In what ways?	Questions 4 and 5
10. What would you identify are the key learning experiences about race and MR/ID category?	Question 1

Does anyone have anything to add they feel is important that I did not ask about?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Interview Protocol: Special Education Teacher

Date:

Start Time:

Introduction:

Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to further discuss practices a district can engage in to reduce overrepresentation of minority students in special education. My name is Jill Brown, and I will serve as the interviewer. The purpose of today's discussion is to gain further information from you about overrepresentation of minority students in special education. You were invited because teach in the district's elementary school specialized program for students with Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability.

Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Feel free to share your point of view.

The interview will last about an hour, and we will not be taking a formal break. Feel free to let me know if you need a break or need to discontinue the interview. No names will be included in any reports.

Questions	Information
1. Tell me your name, position within the school, and how long you have been in your current position and been in the school district.	Learn about participants
2. What do you think are the factors that contributed to initially being identified as having significant disproportionality in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category for students identified as Black.	Questions 2 and 3
3. In what ways were you made aware of the overrepresentation of Black students in the MR/ID eligibility category?	Question 3
4. What has been done to reduce overrepresentation in your school and in your school district?	Questions 1 and 2
5. What types of opportunities for formal and informal professional development regarding race and special education have been provided?	Questions 1, 2, and 5

<p>6. How often is race discussed by both regular and special education staff? Probe: Who discussed race implications and when?</p>	<p>Question 3 and 4</p>
<p>7. Tell me about a time race was discussed prior to, during, or after an eligibility decision. Probe: What was the content and result of the discussion?</p>	<p>Questions 3, 4, and 5</p>
<p>8. How have conversations about race changed or affirmed eligibility practices?</p>	<p>Questions 4 and 5</p>
<p>9. How important is it to discuss race when considering special education eligibility for ID/MR? Probe: In what ways?</p>	<p>Questions 4 and 5</p>
<p>10. What would you identify as key learning experiences about race and MR/ID category?</p>	<p>Question 1</p>

Do you have anything to add you feel is important that I did not ask about?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Interview Protocol: Process Coordinators

Date:

Start Time:

Introduction:

Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to further discuss practices a district can engage in to reduce overrepresentation of minority students in special education. My name is Jill Brown, and I will serve as the interviewer. The purpose of today’s discussion is to gain further information from you about overrepresentation of minority students in special education. You were invited because you participated in a focus group for process coordinators and appeared from your responses to have additional information to share about overrepresentation.

Please remember, there are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others said during the focus group.

The interview will last about an hour, and we will not be taking a formal break. Feel free to let me know if you need a break or need to discontinue the interview. No names will be included in any reports.

Questions	Information
1. Tell me your name, position within the school, and how long you have been in your current position and been in the school district.	Learn about participants
2. What do you think are the factors that contributed to initially being identified as having significant disproportionality in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability eligibility category for students identified as Black.	Questions 2 and 3
3. In what ways were you made aware of the overrepresentation of Black students in the MR/ID eligibility category?	Question 3
4. What has been done to reduce overrepresentation in your school and in your school district?	Questions 1 and 2
5. What types of opportunities for formal and informal professional development regarding race and special education have been provided?	Questions 1, 2, and 5

<p>6. How often is race discussed by both regular and special education staff? Probe: Who discussed race implications and when?</p>	<p>Question 3 and 4</p>
<p>7. Tell me about a time race was discussed prior to, during, or after an eligibility decision. Probe: What was the content and result of the discussion?</p>	<p>Questions 3, 4, and 5</p>
<p>8. How have conversations about race changed or affirmed eligibility practices?</p>	<p>Questions 4 and 5</p>
<p>9. How important is it to discuss race when considering special education eligibility for ID/MR? Probe: In what ways?</p>	<p>Questions 4 and 5</p>
<p>10. What would you identify as key learning experiences about race and MR/ID category?</p>	<p>Question 1</p>

Do you have anything to add you feel is important that I did not ask about?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Document Analysis

Document and Date Analyzed	Key Word(s)	Themes	Q1:	Q2:	Q3:	Q4:	Q5:

Internal Review Board Approval – University of Missouri



Campus Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

485 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-1150
PHONE: (573) 882-9585
FAX: (573) 884-0663

January 26, 2012

Principal Investigator: Brown, Jill
Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

Your Application to project entitled *An Examination of Practices for Reducing the Overrepresentation of Blacks in the Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability Eligibility Category* was reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	1201013
Initial Application Approval Date	January 26, 2012
IRB Expiration Date	January 26, 2013
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Regulation	45 CFR 46.101b(1) 45 CFR 46.101b(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, serious adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All modifications must be IRB approved by submitting the Exempt Amendment prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Annual Exempt Certification Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped document informing subjects of the research and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eIRB.

If you have any questions, please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Borduin".

Charles Borduin, PhD
Campus IRB Chair

VITA

Jill Kirsten Brown was born June 21, 1974 in St. Charles, Missouri, to Danny W. and Linda S. Clark. She is the older of two children with one younger sister. She grew up in Larimore, North Dakota, and graduated from Larimore High School in 1992. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Education Degree in Secondary Education, Language Arts in 1996 at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She immediately began working on her Master's degree.

She married in June 1999 and has one child, born in 2003. She finished her Master's in Education, Special Education at the University of Missouri-Columbia two months after getting married. When her daughter was a year old, Jill began working on her Specialist degree in Secondary Administration at the University of Central Missouri. Before completing her Specialist degree, Jill began working on her Doctor of Education in Education Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri. Jill finished her Specialist degree in Secondary Administration in 2009.

Jill taught high school students as a learning specialist in Columbia Public Schools for two and half years. Jill has worked in the Blue Springs School District for eleven years. She taught eighth grade students as a resource teacher for five years. She then was a process coordinator for five years. During three of those last five years, Jill was also the district transition coordinator. She has been an assistant director of special education for the past year.

Jill earned her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2012. Jill lives in Blue Springs with her husband Chris. They have one child: Allison Brown who is nine-years-old and in third grade.